

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Pulpits and Pews—Professors and Pagans: A Grounded Theory on Worldview Development and
Integration within Christian and Secular Culture

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts – Christian Apologetics

by

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July 30, 2020

Acknowledgements

Many thanks are in order to my thesis committee faculty, Dr. Robert Talley and Dr. Troy Matthews. Thesis projects are always a challenge no matter the subject, but having strong and knowledgeable faculty makes the process easier, and certainly much more enjoyable. Thank you both for your support throughout.

The most important person that I have to thank unfortunately is no longer here. My proofreader, editor, critic, friend, and wife of 16 years went home to be with the Lord on the morning of January 8th, 2020. Despite her illness and struggle, she fully supported my effort and call to a subject I never dreamed of pursuing. She understood the importance of supporting a generation of youth growing up during this time of increasing confusion and ambiguity. She too was confused early on, as was I. Thankfully, she saw the light of the Gospel during a time when most are dismissing it. Hopefully this work makes a minor contribution against the confusion that make people dismiss Christ in their lives.

I dedicate this effort in her memory, my beloved Tammi. Thank you for being my best friend in this life, and although I will see you again soon . . . it is not soon enough for my liking.

“The spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

(Romans 8:16-18)

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Abstract

The fragility characterizing the faith of young believers is nothing new to Christianity. Doubts as to whether or not Christianity is actually true continue to pose challenges to Christian youth as they grow into adulthood in an increasingly secularized culture. This study explores the concept of worldview development and integration within Christian youth, and addresses the growing problem of youth apostasy. Utilizing a methodology based on constructivist grounded theory, this study explores the relevant research on worldview integration and development through six worldview elements (Origin, Purpose, Value, Morality, Nature, Destination) to catalog the available data. The analysis of the research data and subsequent findings of the study conclude with the presentation of a new theory: many Christian youth embrace inconsistent views of the world, in addition to incoherent understandings of Christian doctrine. These problems combined in turn cause varying degrees of individual cognitive dissonance for those youth immersed within secular environments/cultures. This cognitive dissonance in turn causes social, emotional, and psychological stress, resulting in youth embracing the “Christian distance” empirically observed through an overwhelming apostasy, where approximately two-thirds of “born again” youth renounce their Christian faith between the time they begin undergraduate university studies and when they graduate. The study concludes with additional research recommendations regarding cognitive dissonance and Christian youth.

Keywords: Christian, Youth, Worldview, Secularism, Secular, Apostasy, Cognitive Dissonance, Incoherence, Grounded Theory

Introduction & Summary

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the concept of worldview development and integration within Christian youth. Research statistics on the subject are indicative of growing trends of Christian youth leaving the faith, particularly when immersed in secular environments (i.e. post-secondary educational institutions). These two opposing environments and contexts (Christian and secular) is the focus for this inquiry, which poses a broad theory on the potential cause of young Christians turning away from their faith in Christ.

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the problem being addressed, provides an overview of the broader research done on the subject, and transitions the discussion into the concept of worldview. Chapter 2 provides an historical and contemporary overview on worldview as a concept, reviewing the literature, exploring definitions, and concluding with a chosen definition on which the thesis most heavily references. Chapter 3 details the research methodology employed, provides a brief overview of grounded theory (early development, revisions/improvements, etc.), describes the chosen variation, and outlines the six worldview elements used to conduct the research. Chapter 4 discusses trends and observations noted on from the research collected on worldview, reviews the methodology (particularly the challenges/limitations) and describes the most significant findings across the six elements of worldview. Chapter 5 posits a broad theory on the secularization of Christian youth, exploring the potential nature of the tension between the two most distinct worldview elements (Origins and Destination). Chapter 6 closes the thesis with concluding remarks, as well as thoughts on research designs to further investigate this subject.

CHAPTER 1 – FAITH & WORLDVIEW

“A person is smart. People are dumb, panicky dangerous animals and you know it. Fifteen hundred years ago everybody knew the Earth was the center of the universe. Five hundred years ago, everybody knew the Earth was flat, and fifteen minutes ago, you knew that humans were alone on this planet. Imagine what you'll know tomorrow.”¹

~ Agent Kay - “Men in Black”

To give additional context for this scene, Agent Kay (a veteran member of the top secret, alien police organization Men in Black) explains to their newest prospective recruit the reasoning behind the secrecy regarding alien life on Earth. Future Agent Jay is forced to come to grips with the reality that much of what he thought was true about his world around him was definitely not the whole story. Compounding his stress, he has until sunrise the following day to decide whether to join the organization, knowing that he will have to sever all ties not only to his friends and family, but his entire earthly existence. His very essence and soul will be erased from humanity, if he in fact decides to join in order to protect the planet. When Jay asks “Is it worth it?” Agent Kay quickly replies, “Oh yeah! It’s worth it . . . if you’re strong enough.”

The subject matter of this thesis has nothing to do with aliens, top secret government organizations, and the like. However, the truth captured in this and other exchanges throughout the relationship that develops between Agent Kay and Agent Jay speaks volumes to what will be discussed at length. When one experiences any major revelation that challenges their perspective on the world, it is neither uncommon nor unexpected that a great deal of stress will manifest itself against both mind and soul. The person might recoil back in disbelief, or simply reject

¹ *Men in Black*, directed by Barry Sonnenfeld, (Sony Pictures, 1997), 31:15.

their new reality because it is unbearable to investigate further to see whether it is true or not. They would rather embrace ignorance than face the potentially eviscerating truth that they might have been living in a lie all their life. Regardless of how one reacts, a constant definitely prevails; how one views the world around us bears great weight on their life. When that weight suddenly shifts, the response can be very drastic, profound, and sometimes catastrophic. Unfortunately, the drastic and profound nature of any major shift in how one views the world around them often has little to do with whether it is actually *true*. It takes strength and endurance to seek and respond to truth, and like in Agent Jay’s case, it often costs us everything in order to actually follow it.

How one views the world is vitally important no matter where they fall philosophically in their religious conviction. For the Christian, worldviews matter eternally. In all actuality, worldviews matter eternally for everyone; many simply reject the proposition that everyone spends eternity somewhere. It seems however, that anything possessing even the slight potential of carrying eternal consequence deserves a hearing. This study seeks to provide such a hearing by investigating why those eternal perspectives once held by the stewards of humanity (i.e. our youth) appear to be drifting away from spiritual eternity in exchange for worldly temporality.

Christian Youth in Disarray

The faith of Christian youth appears to be experiencing a notable increase in confusion and discomfort in our current time. Some might argue that the state of our youth is in a state of crisis; others might reflect on it with little worry, thinking “They will come back eventually . . . or not.” Regardless of where one falls on the spectrum, the research indicates that our youth are experiencing great tension with the world around them—a tension that is accelerating during latter adolescence, and approaching college. Statistics from Barna Group show that, compared to

other generations, younger believers (i.e. those that fit into the millennial category) are experiencing almost twice as much doubt about their faith in Christianity compared to previous generational groups.² Summit Ministry notes that from the time young believers who identify as “born again” Christians enter their undergraduate college years until they graduate, almost two thirds will have erased that descriptor from their lives.³

The problem of course is not new, but troubling nonetheless. There are several ministries that make it their mission to counter these disturbing trends. CRU (formally known as Campus Crusade), Ratio Christi, Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, and many other groups and individuals engage deeply with believers and unbelievers alike in post-secondary educational environments every day. These organizations would likely admit that despite their efforts, many of our youth continue to be lost to a secularly dominated collegiate environment where prevailing mantras might chant “Do whatever makes you happy” or perhaps something like “You do you, don’t worry about others, or what they think.” Because faith in the person of Jesus Christ is (by its very nature and mandate) uniquely countercultural to the point of being viewed as extreme in its claims about humanity, the consequences for our young people struggling to navigate the world while remaining “not of the world” (John 15:19, NASB)⁴ can be absolutely devastating when they find themselves unprepared.

Like Agent Jay, when someone is unprepared to have their entire view of the world turned upside down, it seems often the result goes beyond simply being flipped over. The true

² “Two Thirds of Christians Face Doubt,” Barna Group, accessed June 1, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/two-thirds-christians-face-doubt/>. The Barna study broke down the various generations into labeled groups (i.e. baby boomers, Generation X, etc.).

³ “Students Abandoning the Faith: Why it Happens and What We Can Do,” Summit Ministries, accessed June 29, 2019, <https://www.summit.org/resources/articles/essays/students-abandoning-the-faith/>

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references come from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB).

tragedy is that someone being flipped over results in the person being emptied and poured out without warning, without explanation, without empathy, without forgiveness, and most importantly . . . without meaning. Where does one go when faced with such overwhelming experiences like Agent Jay, when every belief is thrown into disarray? Does one dive into the water headfirst without measuring the depth of the water or second guessing the jump? Dip a toe in the water first to see how cold it is? This is where Christian youth seem to be today; thrown into disarray, and unsure of how to proceed when there is seemingly no light amidst a fog of confusion.

Intersection of Worldview and Faith

This thesis explores this disarray and looks at whether a distinct (and holistic) Christian view of the world is being developed and integrated based on true faith in the person of Jesus Christ. The research seems to indicate that this not the case, so the basic question is why? The study will look at the nature of how Christian youth are developing their view of the world, how those views are integrated existentially, and attempt to identify potential root causes for such disarray in their faith in Jesus that many will pour everything out and turn away from Him.

The subject is admittedly broad; taken at first glance it is almost overwhelming in scope/scale. Are Christian youth undereducated about the core doctrines of Christianity? Are secular ideologies simply easier to stomach at a young age? Is Christianity being persecuted to the point where our youth see no other means of escape than to renounce their beliefs (even if only in public)? There is a great deal of research that speaks to several facets of what the results are when Christian youth experience secular environments; the statistics shared earlier clearly show a relationship between immersion in a predominately secularized environment and loss of faith. However, *is* that the true cause? This question/problem lies in the complexity that we still

have little idea of what is *actually* happening. What goes on in the mind of a young person of such severity that they turn away from Christ? Though this inquiry merely scratches the surface of a much larger subject, the goal is to review the research as comprehensively as possible in order to establish a theory on what may be happening, which at the very least may provide helpful directions for further research to identify what is truly happening.

Utilizing a methodology somewhat unorthodox in the divinity field, this study employs a grounded theory inquiry into the nature of worldview development and integration for Christian youth. Grounded theory broadly described is an inductive method that begins “with the researcher asking a question or series of questions designed to lead to the development or generation of a theory regarding some aspect of social life.”⁵ For a grounded theory approach, there is no opening thesis statement/hypothesis in the traditional sense. At its core, the inductive nature of grounded theory is designed to review the data and then pose the reader with a substantiated position based (hence grounded) within the data.

This study reviews research already conducted, utilizing six worldview elements that apply to both religious and secular perspectives. After the research was collected, refined, and analyzed, two of the six worldview elements used showed the greatest tension across the matrix. The final theory posited is that the secularization of Christian youth revolves around three fundamental concepts: incoherence, cognitive dissonance, and distance.

The reader might ask, what does worldview truly have to do with belief/unbelief in the God of the Bible? Why is this subject important for the community of faith and the body of Christ? Can we not just preach the Gospel and let the world do what it will? In short, integrating one’s worldview and faith should mean *everything* to a believer.

⁵ “Grounded Theory,” Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, accessed June 1, 2020, <http://www.qualres.org/HomeGrou-3589.html>

Worldview foundations critical to lasting faith

When faced with new information about our world (regardless of its veracity), there really are but a mere few practical choices to make. One either takes the information at face value as truth, rejects the information as false, or investigates it further to figure out whether it is true or false. Agent Jay was confronted with truth when he personally saw aliens on the Earth with his own eyes, yet others might have been convinced with much less evidence. In any case, once he made the decision to go with the truth, he pursued it “hook, line, and sinker” so to speak. That is what a worldview ultimately does—it takes propositional truth, which then exerts influence on someone’s life based on that truth.⁶ That is, this is the simple, ideal concept of worldview; the reality becomes much more complex, as the concept is highly abstract in nature.

This study affirms the position that worldview is vitally important to faith in Christ, and anchor that claim because of one harsh truth: biblical views of the world are not resonating within the *body* of Christ. When it comes to Christianity and biblical worldview, such a “hook/line/sinker” commitment is not what we are observing and certainly not what the data suggests. Not only is Christianity seemingly on the decline culturally, but the basic understanding of Christianity by those who do identify as such is remarkably low. In survey findings published by Pew Research Center, adult Americans describing themselves as Christian was 65% in 2019 (down from 77% in 2009). During that same timeframe, the percentage of respondents described as atheist, agnostic, or “nothing in particular” rose from 17% in 2009 to 26% in 2019.⁷

⁶ When we refer to propositional truth, we are referring to propositions (are considered either true or false) independent of the logical framework, and will be visited again with a discussion on the law of non-contradiction.

⁷ “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace,” Pew Research Center, Accessed June 1, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

In 2017, Barna Group noted that, in addition to the increase in expressed doubt among the younger generations mentioned previously, biblical worldview is eroding as well. In the representative sampling of 1,456 practicing U.S. Christian adults over the age of 18, only 17% of the respondents who attend church regularly and consider their faith important actually subscribe to a biblical worldview. When broken down further, the study showed that:

- 61% agree with ideas rooted in New Spirituality.
- 54% resonate with postmodernist views.
- 36% accept ideas associated with Marxism.
- 29% believe ideas based on secularism.⁸

If these data points were not disconcerting enough, Barna notes in a separate study of a variety of denominational Protestant churches and 600 senior pastors, only half (51%) of them subscribed to the same defining characteristics of a biblical worldview.⁹

The importance becomes clear from looking at just a few trends. As an example, youth are identifying as being Christian, however are largely devoid of both an understanding and adherence to a biblical worldview. These trends could be indicative of many causes, however because individual quantitative studies of any subject (by design) must be structured in a manner where the data collected is highly focused so it can actually be useful and measured, they often carry limited explanatory value. This unfortunately leaves many unanswered questions as to root

⁸ “Competing Worldviews Influence Today’s Christians,” Barna Group, accessed June 1, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/competing-worldviews-influence-todays-christians/>. Barna defines a biblical worldview as “believing that absolute moral truth exists; the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches; Satan is considered to be a real being or force, not merely symbolic; a person cannot earn their way into Heaven by trying to be good or do good works; Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; and God is the all-knowing, all-powerful creator of the world who still rules and acts within the universe today.”

⁹ “Only half of Protestant pastors have a biblical worldview,” Barna Group, accessed June 1, 2020. <https://www.barna.com/research/only-half-of-protestant-pastors-have-a-biblical-worldview/>. This was a slightly older study (2005), and incorporated similar elements of biblical worldview.

causality of the trends being observed, which seems particularly true for social issues as complex as religion. Before covering how this study intends to identify gaps in the discussion on biblical worldview methodologically, the next chapter develops the concept in more detail both from a historical and a contemporary context to orient the reader to where the concept of worldview began, where the literature is today, and where it appears to be going.

CHAPTER 2 – WORLDVIEW/DEFINITIONS

“According to the doctrine of chance, you ought to put yourself to the trouble of searching for the truth; for if you die without worshipping the True Cause, you are lost.—‘But,’ say you, ‘if He had wished me to worship Him, He would have left me signs of His will.’—He has done so; but you neglect them. Seek them, therefore; it is worth it.”¹⁰

~ Blaise Pascal

Introduction

In Pascal’s spiritual “wager,” he basically takes the position that, if he lives in a certain way (for the cause of Christ) and passes away amidst the potential error that God actually does not exist, frankly he would no longer be in a position to regret believing in and following Christ.¹¹ He would have lived a fulfilling life and in the end would not have anything further to do (or feel) in death. By contrast, for those who do *not* believe in Jesus and are inevitably faced with His retort, “I never knew you” (Matt. 7:23), there is no turning back the clock to offer their allegiance; there is no recovery from that chasm. They now belong to the chasm, separated from God eternally.

Pascal’s work here should not be overshadowed by the wager itself; he was trying to make a larger point, and this quote speaks to it. If an individual’s view of the world is focused solely on “the world” when it should be obvious that everyone will depart this world in physical death, then they are kidding themselves and simply ignoring the inevitable. Everyone has to make a choice about who Jesus is (along with every other religion) and be willing to take it to the grave with them. Anything short of such a commitment dilutes the deity of Christ (John 14:6)

¹⁰ Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, (New York: Philosophical Library, 2016), 80.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

and relegates His words in the Great Commission to a mere suggestion/guideline. Put another way, when Jesus says “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19-20), anyone who sees this and other similar examples in Scripture as anything short of an absolute command from God are diminishing the deity and authority of Christ. To subscribe absolute belief in Christ is to resolutely believe in His authority and deity absolutely; there is no middle ground.

C.S. Lewis speaks to this as well, saying that:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice . . . let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.¹³

What we believe about the person of Jesus Christ and the God of Scripture, both in affirmation and denial, directly shapes how we will view and live in the world. Hence to echo some of the discussion from earlier, developing and integrating a worldview based on the truth of Jesus is extremely important for our youth to understand.

Developing, integrating, and living out a biblical worldview does not happen by being in church every Sunday; it does not happen by growing up in a Christian home; it does not happen

¹³ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* in *The C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2017), 51.

by going to seminary. It happens when someone personally encounters Christ, comprehends who He is, and then commits themselves to learning about, relating to, and serving Him. Only then can a worldview begin to form *by, for, and through* the Son of God. Having said that, what does the term “worldview” mean beyond the simple notion of how someone characterizes and understands the world? The following brief historical overview offers some additional context.

Historical Review of Worldview (Secular)

Worldview theory is a relatively recent concept compared to other philosophical inquiries, emerging only in the last couple hundred years. Sire notes that, even though the term itself (a translation from the German word *Weltanschauung*) was first used by Immanuel Kant in the 18th century, a major focus on worldview as a concept did not start to gain attention until the mid-19th to early 20th century.¹⁴ Sire’s work looks to both secular and Christian worldview thinkers. He addresses the fact that perhaps up until recently, most would have accepted the vague definition that we described earlier; as he puts it, a worldview “is the fundamental perspective from which one addresses every issue of life.”¹⁵ This will perhaps satisfy a casual conversation, and in our view would be more than sufficient even for a basic evangelistic encounter. However, Sire notes that a treatment of worldview that is too vague leaves much to be discussed, and that such a definition “leaves completely open such questions as to whether a worldview is a universal, abstract philosophy or an individual, personal vision; whether finally there is one worldview or many.”¹⁶ These questions have been looked at through the brief

¹⁴ James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 23.

¹⁵ Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, 24.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

history of worldview theory, and there is no doubt that the subject is large and abstract. A few contributions to worldview thinking are especially worth noting, as they influenced Christian thinkers and their theological responses to the secular academic thought that became dominant in the late 19th/early 20th century. We begin with Wilhelm Dilthey.

Dilthey looked at worldview as finding its root in life itself.¹⁷ This at least makes sense on its surface, in that no matter what, every living human will at some point have to recognize at the very least a few core realities. In his review of worldview thinking, Naugle speaks to these realities in terms of “the certainty of death, the cruelty of the natural process, a general transitoriness.”¹⁸ However for Dilthey, the question of how those certainties will be approached in terms of how someone views the world is primarily dependent on the individual; he sees worldview development as a highly *individualistic* process, where he notes that “worldviews develop under different conditions, climate, races, nationalities, determined by history and through political organization, time bound confines of epochs and eras.”¹⁹ Because this perspective originates from an individualistic mindset, it reeks of relative truth at its core—the idea that truth is not a matter of objective reality, but individual interpretations of one’s world.

Though Sire does note that Dilthey “held that there is a common human nature and a common reality,”²⁰ Dilthey’s perspective nevertheless remains strongly anchored to a secular perspective of humanity that, depending solely on how, where, and under what conditions

¹⁷ Wilhelm Dilthey, “The Types of World Views and their Unfoldment Within Metaphysical Systems,” in *Dilthey’s Philosophy of Existence: Introduction to Weltanschauungslehre*, trans. William Kluback and Martin Weinbaum (New York: Bookman, 1957), 21.

¹⁸ David Naugle, *Worldview: History of a Concept*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 86.

¹⁹ Dilthey, *Types of Worldviews*, 27

²⁰ Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, 26.

someone is exposed to (and absorbs), the reality around them will ultimately determine *their* own worldview which is unique to them alone. Sire summed up Dilthey's definition of worldview as "a set of mental categories arising from deeply lived experience which essentially determines how a person understands, feels, and responds in action to what he or she perceives of the surrounding world and the riddles it presents."²¹

Sire's summation here is certainly helpful, and of course there is merit to what Dilthey is conveying. There should be little question that individual experiences in life will certainly have a dramatic impact on how one will react to, attempt to understand, and reconcile the world surrounding them. However, one should take note here that despite his contribution to the *extrinsic* influence on how a human being perceives the world, Dilthey largely ignores anything that could be viewed as *intrinsic* to being human. Is there something (if humans in fact share that "something" in common), that directly influences our ability to form and conceptualize a worldview? If there are commonalities to the largest questions everyone asks in one form or another about being human (i.e. where do we come from, what should we do, where do we go at death, etc), there should likewise be common threads to what humanity concludes about the world in which they live. Yet there are vastly contrasting views, which of course is the raging debate that transcends generations. Dilthey certainly was not the only secular thinker to discount the intrinsic possibilities of human nature and worldview; there were other important contributors to the idea that worldview is highly individualistic, and situationally dependent.

We cannot ignore the famous (or perhaps infamous) contributions of Friedrich Nietzsche in this regard. Nietzsche's perspective on worldview was starkly nihilistic and quite dismissive of any notion of any transcendent reality in a supreme being/God. Ironically though, some of his

²¹ Ibid, 27.

writings are stylistically laced with theistic references that suggest the “loss/death” of God in our modern age actually carried very serious moral and existential implications; with the absence of a transcendent source to govern our lives, we have no choice but to figure it out ourselves.

Nietzsche expressed this seriousness through one of his parables:

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. *We have killed him---*you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.²²

Nietzsche acknowledges the problem that, once God is removed from the picture, the result is a huge gap in humanity. He goes on in the parable to say:

How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? *What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent?* Is not the greatness of this deed

²² Modern History Sourcebook, *Nietzsche: Parable of the Madman*, Fordham University, accessed 1 June 2020, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/nietzsche-madman.asp>, emphasis original.

too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?

There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us---for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto.²³

To Nietzsche's credit, he recognizes the problem with removing God from one's worldview; something else must fill in the gap, because the void is very real and important to humanity. Sire notes that for Nietzsche, by "asserting the centrality and power of the self and its attendant will," one moves towards a livable reality and creating his own values.²⁴ His conception of worldview rests on the notion that they are all "relative to their time and place and circumstance" and those able to exert the strongest will then had the ability to impose it on others.²⁵ So again, in a similar stance to Dilthey, Nietzsche largely ignores any potential for there to be any intrinsic potential with regard to worldview; it is merely signs and symptoms of the times exerting its influence on an individual. Both their perspectives were in keeping with their own relative time and space, coming into the late 19th to early 20th century where postmodern thought was on the march towards secular, individual notions of truth. What then of the religious thinkers of the day? There were certainly opposing perspectives from religious worldview thinkers, which have shaped much of the debate to this day.

Historical Review of Worldview (Religious)

Christian academics involving themselves with worldview thinking also traces back to the late 19th century with James Orr and his work titled *The Christian View of God and the*

²³ Ibid., emphasis added.

²⁴ *Naming the Elephant*, 27.

²⁵ Ibid., 27-29.

World.²⁶ Orr's work was one of the early efforts to respond to the challenges of the day (no doubt from Nietzsche and similar voices). He speaks to the challenge and takes a distinct apologetic perspective, saying that:

The opposition which Christianity has to encounter is no longer confined to special doctrines or to points of supposed conflict with natural sciences . . . but extends to the whole matter of conceiving of the world, and of man's place in it, the manner of conceiving of the entire system of things, natural and moral, of which we form a part. It is no longer an opposition of detail, but of principle.²⁷

Orr recognized what was happening within the bigger philosophical picture; Christianity was no longer being simply challenged in fragmented discourse, challenging one minor doctrine here, or a scientific position there. Rather, Orr realized that the pervasion of increasingly secularized perspectives within academia and culture was now challenging *everything* within the Christian faith.

It is important to keep in mind that Orr's thoughts here were developed over 120 years ago. His perspective is quite prophetic given what we are witnessing today on the subject of Christian youth; they are being challenged on multiple fronts, which makes their struggle even more difficult. No longer is the Christian being challenged individually based on what they profess to follow dogmatically within the faith; the Christian is now being challenged more holistically—their very personhood (and their place in the world) is being attacked. Orr goes on in his first lecture to say:

²⁶ James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*, (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1908). This work was actually a compilation of a series of lectures that were given by Orr in the late 1890s. Additionally, we are not suggesting that other prominent thinkers throughout church history did not look at issues surrounding worldview. Merely that as a *concept*, worldview is a relatively recent development.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

He who with his whole heart believes in Jesus as the Son of God is thereby committed to much else besides. He is committed to a view of God, to a view of man, to a view of sin, to a view of Redemption, to a view of the purpose of God in creation and history, to a view of human destiny, found only in Christianity. This forms a “Weltanschauung,” or “Christian view of the world,” which stands in marked contrast within theories wrought out from a purely philosophical or scientific standpoint.²⁸

Take note of what Orr is striving to convey fundamentally; a worldview is a commitment. It is a commitment not only comprehensive in nature, it is one that (for the Christian at least) is completely at odds with the philosophy (either in whole or in part) of the rest of the world. Orr also speaks to not only what a worldview is, but also what it does. He says that a worldview ultimately “abuts on questions of origin, purpose, and destiny, which as questions set by reason to itself, it cannot, from its very nature refuse at least to attempt to answer.”²⁹ Secular thinkers of the day were not only searching for something that could fill the “gap” of God, but they were also heavily invested in postulating general (or grand) theories regarding observations of the world and universe around them. Orr notes that “with all the distaste of the age for metaphysics, the tendency to the formations of world-systems, or general theories of the universe, was never more powerful than at the present day.”³⁰

There is a fascinating aspect to Orr’s observations here which we will discuss in more depth in later chapters, however it warrants a brief mention here. As the tension has increased throughout the ages between Christianity and secular perspectives, so too has the need for

²⁸ *The Christian View of God and the World*, 16.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

secular theories of our world and universe to offer increased explanations for “everything.” In other words, as the secularist’s attacks against Christian theism have both increased and broadened in veracity and scope, so too has their need to fill the void with alternative explanations. This will be explored in greater detail later in the discussion on coherence. For now, suffice that when one looks at the phenomena holistically, in many ways Christians easily miss the implications of what is happening. As we find ourselves more frequently on the defensive to articulate to others a holistic and comprehensive “reason for the hope that we have” that Peter talks about (1 Pet. 3:13-18), we easily overlook that the secularist has left their own flanks wide open to similar (yet much deeper) scrutiny.

It is this researcher’s view that this is exactly what is happening; Christians find themselves so engulfed in deflecting questions away from themselves that they fail to see that it would be more fruitful to catch those questions into their own philosophical “baseball glove,” take a brief look at the ball, and then proceed to play catch with the secularist. In other words, one should interact with the “ball” (i.e. question/objection), give it fair attention/answers, then postulate the same question right back at its origin; throw the same ball right back at the secularist to give their answer as well. Admittedly, this takes a great deal of thought and preparation. Yet ultimately it is what God has called us to do, both through Jesus and the Apostle Paul—to “love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength” (Mark 12:30) and to “be transformed through the renewal of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). To do anything less would be to make less of the basic tenets that undergird what it means to be a Christian in the first place. A couple more historical Christian thinkers and their concepts of worldview speak to the crucial need for an integrated worldview both mentally and spiritually.

Coming into the early 20th century, Herman Dooyeweerd is described by Sire as “perhaps the most philosophic of all Christian worldview thinkers” and at the same time, one who stood firmly on the notion that “theoretical thought does not lie at the basis of one’s worldview.”³¹ Sire notes that Dooyeweerd’s approach is pretheoretical and has to do less with “the mind as with the heart.”³² Dooyeweerd takes on more of a spiritual anchoring for worldview development versus others, in that he sees only two paths that one can take in trying to come to a workable worldview. On one hand, someone may find themselves “converted to God” and therefore simply asserts their worldview from that perspective.³³ On the other hand, one finds themselves on the complete opposite end of the spectrum and falls to a position of being completely “averted from God.”³⁴ Dooyeweerd’s approach is, on one hand, refreshing in that it is relatively simple (without being simplistic). On the other hand, that simplicity comes at the expense of being polarizing—you are either with God, or you are against God. Naugle affirms as well that this is where Dooyeweerd stakes his position; until one is converted to God in the person of Jesus Christ, a worldview cannot truly be formed.³⁵

One might easily dismiss Dooyeweerd’s position as overly simplistic, or at least simple in its stance on theism. One could criticize him from a distinct (yet contemporary) position as being exceedingly phobic against worldviews that dare to shift any tide against the notion of an

³¹ *Naming the Elephant*, 34-35.

³² *Ibid.*, 36.

³³ Jacob Klapwijk, “On worldviews and philosophy,” *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science*. (Lanham: University Press, 1989), 51.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Worldview: History of a Concept*, 77. This perspective would also be shared by apologists of a pre-suppositionalist bent; until one’s view of God is anchored, developing views of the world will be fractured and distorted.

omniscient, omnipresent, and omnibenevolent Being. Either perspective could be argued given the time and context—such is not our focus. The point of what Dooyeweerd is conveying is that, for a “worldview” to manifest itself in the purest sense, one must first come to the realization that the world was made by God, through which the person of Jesus Christ is God (as one person in the triune God head). Only then can one begin the “building” process of constructing a true worldview centered on Christ as God. Where ever one’s inclinations may lead them in reading such an assertion, it is an idea that will be revisited later.

Regardless of what one might believe with regards to the nature of truth in our world, there is at least one constant that rears its head (albeit an ugly one); humanity is consistently in pursuit of *some version of truth*. We might be seeking a partial truth, half-truth, distorted truth, or a truth at the behest of a doctor of some discipline. The fact remains that, even in the most mundane and obscure facets of our lives, some modicum of truth will surface either for (or against) our faculties as we navigate this world.

Yet, is this not the heart of the matter? Most (if not all) are perfectly willing to pursue truth to the point where it satisfies them from a position of comfort. Yet when that same pursuit of truth becomes uncomfortable to those same faculties, one tends to start closing off the valves of truth. That is exactly when and where worldview begins to break down; when one starts to feel uncomfortable with the truth that they are facing (and shy away from it), it becomes harder to see the world for what it truly is. To that end, one additional historical thinker is worth mentioning from the Christian perspective.

Abraham Kuyper latched onto worldview by tying it directly to a theological construct, where Calvinist Christianity was (in his view) able to provide all of the required elements to

form a worldview.³⁷ His theology notwithstanding, Kuyper's work in Calvinist theology provides some very focused discussion on the subject (particularly with regard to defining what a worldview is and does). In his lectures, Kuyper contends that a worldview has to answer three questions: how do we relate to God, our fellow man, and the world as a whole.³⁸ Sire mentions that Kuyper's focused concept of worldview makes an important contribution that will be revisited when we speak to definitions. Kuyper believed that every worldview has to be anchored somehow on one fundamental concept.³⁹ Sire notes also that Kuyper was quite familiar with the work of James Orr, and his concept of worldview seems to line up well with Orr's perspectives.⁴⁰ One must have a core, fundamental "grounding" on some aspect of their perception of reality by which to conceptualize life. Without it, one might find themselves in a situation as having their feet firmly planted in midair; there is no starting point.

At some point, everyone has to commit themselves to some "faith" system; there is no choice in the matter. For many, it will be undergirded by the assumption that there is in fact a supreme being. Such a worldview takes on a plethora of different paths depending on one's perspective on said being. For others, the idea of a supreme being is such an anathema to their faculties that they must latch onto a purely naturalistic, scientific, and materialistic view of their world and universe—again, taken from a position of faith. Like Nietzsche and many other secularists after him, one can take that leap of faith in the direction of a purely material world where there is a gap in one's moral world. Yet that gap in morality has to be filled; it cannot be

³⁷ *Naming the Elephant*, 33.

³⁸ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 30.

³⁹ *Naming the Elephant*, 34.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

ignored and thrown to chance. For any objective moral framework to even have a chance of existing, the secularist must also fill a gap as to where it comes from in a purely material world. This will be expounded in later chapters. For the time being, recognize (as has been shown through some of the historical thinking) one of the greatest challenges historical thinkers faced on the subject of worldview—defining it? Can it be defined succinctly and holistically? Our discussion now turns to recent definitions, and frames the questions at hand for this study.

Contemporary Worldview Definitions

Even given the relatively brief treatment put together thus far, hopefully it has become clear that the concept of worldview carries a depth and breadth to it that far exceeds the scope of what can reasonably be covered in this study. It is a large subject, and particularly due to its broad and abstract nature, hard to define. Indeed, it stands to reason that whatever one's worldview will (in and of itself) have a marked impact on how one defines it.⁴² Scholars have however offered some means to “pin” worldview down.

In kind with the historical overview, this is merely a sampling of a few definitions offered—there are too many to mention. The goal is to expound on the more relevant definitions/directions thinkers have taken towards answering the need for defining a worldview that benefit this specific study. Moreover, though modern secular perspectives on worldviews (and their unique definitions and/or characterizations) will be discussed throughout the remainder of this study, we have dispensed with a specific review on secular worldview definitions. Our focus is on Christian youth and their worldview (or lack thereof), so therefore

⁴² For the purposes of this study, we will not broach too deeply into the philosophical challenges on this. Suffice to say, how one defines worldview “while having one” is the classical issue of “being before knowing” or knowing before being.” Sire speaks to this in his third chapter in *Naming the Elephant*.

too our focus on worldview integration and development primarily remains in the realm of religious thought.

Starting with Albert Wolters, he developed a definition that might be considered overly short given the broad nature of worldview. However short, coming at the question as a theologian, Wolters does offer several descriptors and qualifiers to his definition. His opening statement on worldview is that it is “the comprehensive framework of one’s basic beliefs about things.”⁴³ Wolters points to worldview as a phenomena that is an inescapable piece of human knowledge that it is based on a several presuppositions that ultimately, based on shared human knowledge, cannot find their roots purely in the scientific realm of explanation.⁴⁴ Speaking to those presuppositions, he says that “just as aesthetics presupposes some innate sense of the beautiful and legal theory presupposes a fundamental notion of justice, so theology and philosophy presuppose a pretheoretical perspective on the world.”⁴⁵

Again, coming from the perspective of a theologian (markedly Reformed in his approach), Wolters is looking at worldview from a lens of a transcendent cause and effect, as well as cause/effect on humanity in terms of its separated state from that first cause in the being of God. To be able to form a worldview then, one must have a beginning. This makes at least logical sense; one must have some semblance of self-awareness and consciousness. Otherwise, there is no “seeing” the world to establish anything tangible (or intangible for that matter) regarding reality. It again raises the issue of being vs. knowing point brought up earlier, and for

⁴³ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Wolters the obvious position is that the human being (made in the image of God and his likeness) is therefore able to comprehend and appreciate these and other presuppositions associated with “being human.” The transcendent first cause of human existence in God’s creation is the foundation for human worldview development.

In a similar fashion, Ronald Nash approaches the issue of a worldview from a theistic lens, and argues that one’s view on God bears the greatest burden on how someone will form their worldview. Because of the need for a theistic starting point, he also looks at worldview from a pretheoretical stance. However, Nash goes broader than Wolters; he expands into a more philosophical focus in his elements for what makes up a worldview, of which there are five: God, ultimate reality, knowledge, ethics, and humankind.⁴⁶ In addition to these five elements, he offers two additional factors that should be taken into consideration; one’s view on what would be “ideal” within the world, as well as parallel understanding/explanation as to why those ideals do not exist.⁴⁷ For Nash, “worldviews function as interpretive conceptual schemes to explain why we ‘see’ the world as we do, why we often think and act as we do.”⁴⁸ His position is helpful in many ways, but suffice for now to mention that his emphasis on “why” we do or think something is perhaps of much greater importance for introspection than the “what.”

Though not specifically focused on worldview theory exclusively, the work of William Lane Craig and J.P Moreland certainly deserve mention on the subject. Also philosophical in its focus, they categorize worldview in a broad (yet succinct) manner in saying a worldview is “an

⁴⁶ Ronald Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict; Choosing Christianity in the World of Ideas*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1992), 16-18.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 18. As a side note, Nash’s thoughts here reconcile well with two chosen elements used later in the study, namely “Desired Behavior” and “Observed Behavior.”

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

ordered set of propositions that one believes, especially propositions about life's most important questions."⁴⁹ This definition is interesting because it speaks specifically to belief, and the importance of those beliefs as they relate to the nature of human life and living. It is one thing to say that one adheres or identifies with a particular set of values, propositions, ethics, and so forth. It is quite another to *ascribe* value and truth to a set propositions and simultaneously *subscribe* fully to those same truths as the metaphysical compass for one's life. Again, we will revisit part of this definition as well, but consider for a moment that this is potentially a major factor for Christian youth. They may have identified themselves with Christianity at an early age without going through any process of ascription of truth to what they profess to identify with.

Finally, James Sire's review of worldview includes a definition that most closely focuses on the important aspects of this study and was leaned on throughout the research collection and analysis. He defines worldview as follows:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ J.P. Moreland & William Land Craig, *Philosophical Foundations of a Christian Worldview*, 2nd ed, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2017), 15.

⁵⁰ *Naming the Elephant*, 141.

If we break this down partially and focus on the first couple of elements, there are important implications behind what Sire is saying. He labels worldview as a “commitment and fundamental” to someone’s basic constitution of reality.

Growing up, this author personally remembers vividly being taught to honor your commitments, follow through, and finish whatever you have committed yourself to. This is not to suggest some impetus or imperative for following through on commitments completely after critical reflection on and (when absolutely necessary) shifting our perspective away from things we should not commit to whether for legal or moral reasons—far from it. However, the necessity of someone fully understanding and counting the costs of *any* commitment before they even consider it is critical. Many Christian youth make reference to the “difficult” teachings of Jesus, and commitment is one of them. They often seem to emphasize the less difficult teachings, yet Jesus Himself speaks to the harsh reality of commitment rather bluntly:

Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish’ (Luke 14:26-30).

This is arguably part of the challenge for Christian youth today; they have unwittingly (albeit without malice or ill intent) signed up for a box of goods while being unaware of not only what was actually in the box, but also the cost of said box. It is similar to someone who does not have sufficient funds in the bank to cover the cost of a catastrophic repair to the foundation of their home; they may have to sell their home at a loss, become indebted to someone else in order to

repair it, or continue to live in a home that is crumbling down around them. No matter what they decide to do, the end result is having to deal with damaged goods that they never saw coming. They are left either with an empty bank account, a form of indentured servitude, or (at worst) a worldview that is crumbling down because they did not understand it (or how to maintain it) to begin with.

Regardless of why the Christian youth population is leaving (assuming it can be given any unambiguous attribution), the Barna studies referenced previously speak clearly to many youth who no longer identify as being “born again” after their undergraduate studies at the university were complete. The simple issue is that it is happening; the complex issue is that there are several potential causes. The problem could be educational, or perhaps it is a spiritual problem. It could be an existential and/or identity problem. In any case, what we are certainly *not* witnessing is commitment. Perhaps the body of Christ is fueling (whether intentionally or otherwise) false understandings of Christian doctrine that, when combined with other presuppositions (to quote Sire) which are partially true or completely false, lead to a state of being where there truly is no Christian worldview to begin with. Rather, you have an individual who is navigating their world *without a clear view* and merely clinging to an abstract identity in the name of Christ. This ought not be; if Christianity carries the day for absolute truth, it should be everything *but* an abstract, social identity.

For someone to say they truly believe in the provision and grace of the person of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in their life, to then renounce that belief as having withered away in a mere four years of being away from the body of Christ (regardless of the cause) at the very least means one very important thing. That person has no compass, no rudder, and certainly no captain at the helm of their life if their renunciation is genuine. This assertion is not meant to be

condemning, demeaning, mocking, or ostracizing. All this suggests is that (perhaps) some Christian youth did not actually believe because they misconstrued (or misunderstood) the true nature of God's provision for the people that have faith in him. Instead, their drastically shifting environment reveals that, in all actuality, they put their faith in whatever provision they saw in front of them simply because that is the only aspect of their lives that they can taste, feel, touch, and understand to be real; everything else deep down is a fairy tale. They were inspiring stories growing up in Sunday school, going to summer camp, and the like. Now, those tales are relegated to the mental card catalog;⁵⁵ sent to the fiction, drama, and perhaps even horror section of a dusty library that no longer bears relevance to one's life both existentially and spiritually.

Conclusion

This study is not meant (nor designed) to offer a grand solution to what the statistics are showing us. Again, depending on one's perspective, the problem may simply be better understood through more effective research. By contrast, one might fall in the camp where quite literally, the Christian summer camp is falling out of the sky and our Christian youth are doomed to the inevitable secularization of society; there is nothing we can do besides run and hide. It is this researcher's position that the breadth/depth of the issue is largely irrelevant because we do not understand the true nature of problem. All we are observing is the spiritual "mess" created by whatever the problem actually is. To that end, the discussion shifts to the study itself, beginning with a brief overview of grounded theory (history, uses, variations of the theory, etc.), a detailed description of the variation we used, the elements of worldview, data coding process, and a sample of the research matrices employed throughout the data collection.

⁵⁵ Humorous side note: If you vividly remember card catalogs, you are in a generation that needs to be leading young Christians to truth. Tell a youngster what a card catalog is, then make sure they know Christ.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

Introduction

So far in our review of worldview, one broad fundamental truth has risen to the surface: the concept itself (depending on how it is defined/confined) is to varying degrees incredibly abstract. In and of itself, this is not a negative facet of worldview. However, one of the challenges that arises whenever abstract concepts are studied comes the need and desire to balance the abstract nature of the concept, while adhering to a methodology that (while potentially abstract itself) has the ability to solidify itself from a loose inquiry to a plausible theory and/or causality. In other words, akin to the house foundation analogy from Chapter 2, we need the concrete to flow and harden properly to be useful in building anything further. As an abstract and inductive methodology, grounded theory serves to do just that; the researcher looks at a slurry of data in an attempt to uncover something potentially useful for the research community writ large.

As mentioned briefly in the introduction, with the exception of researchers in the field of philosophy of religion, Christian counseling, and other social sciences, grounded theory is likely a foreign method to the larger field of divinity study. Grounded theory has been utilized to a great degree within the social sciences (i.e. psychology, sociology, anthropology, etc.) as well as the medical/health community. In fact, it was in a medical context that grounded theory was formed.⁵⁶ This chapter will expound on the methodology of grounded theory, briefly discuss its origins, review its historical development/alterd versions over time, provide a detailed explanation of the chosen usage for this study, and outline the six primary elements of worldview

⁵⁶ Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967), 2.

that the research effort in Chapters 4 & 5 will focus on. With that, let's turn to the question at hand; what exactly is grounded theory?

Historical/Literature Overview

The development of grounded theory occurred within a medical study conducted by two sociologists (Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss) in the late 1960s, studying the nature of “interactions between medical staff and terminally ill patients in hospices.”⁵⁷ Their research techniques were initially characterized as the constant comparative method, but later was entitled *grounded theory* to encapsulate its overarching objective to ground theory in empirical research.”⁵⁸ As social scientists, Glaser and Strauss were in a field that, at the time, was dominated by research methods that were distinctly deductive in nature. They made the observation that “since verification has primacy on the current sociological scene, the desire to generate theory often becomes secondary, if not totally lost, in specific researches.”⁵⁹

In other words, sociologists at the time were more concerned with either confirming or denying hypotheses based on their observations of data versus making progress on sociological theory. Glaser and Strauss saw the need to generate theory from an opposite perspective, where instead of looking at “theories logically deduced from *a priori* assumptions,”⁶⁰ they contended that “marrying theory construction with social research would produce a robust and astute hypothesis *grounded* in the research.”⁶¹ For Glaser and Strauss, this was essentially putting the

⁵⁷ Kenny Meabh and Robert Fourie, “Tracing the History of Grounded Theory Methodology: From Formation to Fragmentation,” *The Qualitative Report*, 19, 103 (2014), 1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2. Emphasis original.

⁵⁹ *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, 2.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶¹ *The Qualitative Report*, 2.

metaphorical horse exactly where it needed to be—in front of the cart, to pull the hypothesis to a proper conclusion/destination, rather than repeating deductive studies over and over again and yielding little results from the effort.

Grounded theory methods took some time to garner support from the larger sociological community. Strauss notes that, during the timeframe when grounded theory was being developed, research in the qualitative arena was at a “low status” within the greater social science community due to the underlying assumption that qualitative research was incapable of providing verification of what was being theorized.⁶² Kathy Charmaz (an early contemporary of both Strauss and Glaser) also noted that, once the method began to garner more support in the decades that followed, Glaser and Strauss’ work made a “cutting edge statement” against the prevailing methods of the day.⁶³ Grounded theory was here to stay, and ushered in a new era for (predominantly) qualitative researchers who continue to use it to this day. Though it has continued in its expanse and reach amongst the academic community, the characterization and use of grounded theory has not remained “pure” in the sense that the methodology itself has undergone modification and growing pains throughout its relatively short history—much of it between the two thinkers who originally developed it.

The first major addition/contribution to grounded theory came when Strauss joined up with Juliet Corbin and designed a more formalized coding process and framework, which put greater emphasis on symbolic interactionism and pragmatism.⁶⁴ Additionally, the coding process was much more prescriptive and analytical, which by its design allowed the researcher to take a

⁶² *The Qualitative Report*, 3.

⁶³ Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 2nd Ed, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2014), 5.

⁶⁴ *The Qualitative Report*, 4.

more systematic approach to the data. Strauss and Corbin shifted the focus of grounded theory more into the qualitative realm (in contrast to Glaser's "classic" stance on grounded theory, where anything and everything is data whether qualitative or quantitative). In other words, the formalized approach gave the researcher a "template" and greater access to engage in grounded theory research. Glaser was extremely upset about the shift in the theory to the point where, in the first page to his rebuttal of the modified methodology, he demanded that the book be retracted pending a mutual rewrite.⁶⁵ Glaser believed that Strauss and Corbin's treatment of grounded theory was in fact a "whole different method, so why call it grounded theory?"⁶⁶ Nevertheless, they proceeded with the publication of their modification of the method despite Glaser's objections, which is colloquially known in academia as "Straussian" grounded theory.⁶⁷

The third version of grounded theory comes from a name mentioned earlier, Kathy Charmaz, who again was a student under both Glaser and Strauss during its early development of grounded theory. However, in similar fashion as Strauss and Corbin, Charmaz recognized additional factors that could bear a heavy burden on the development and implementation of a grounded theory methodology. She ultimately "rejected Glaser's underlying philosophy of *discovering* an implicit theory"⁶⁸ and instead asserted that as a researcher, one has little choice but to "construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and

⁶⁵ Barney Glaser, *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis: Emergence versus Forcing*, (Mill Valley: Sociology Press, 1992), 1. Incidentally, it was quite a scathing demand, bordering on extreme arrogance. Glaser made this request: "I demand that you withdraw the book pending a rewriting of it. And then you and I sit down and go through each page of the book and iron out what I consider to be the misconceptions and then rewrite the book by mutual consent."

⁶⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁷ Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1990).

⁶⁸ *The Qualitative Report*, 6.

interactions with people, perspectives and research practices.”⁶⁹ Charmaz’ position is that, as a researcher, you cannot disconnect yourself from research in an unbiased manner. There will always be an influence from the researcher on the results, thereby making any theory “co-constructed” between the researcher and the data. However, Charmaz did not go as far as Strauss in asserting that the coding process necessarily had to be rigidly prescribed either.⁷⁰ One could argue that Charmaz struck a middle ground between the two thinkers; Glaser on one side, looking to achieve the goal of a theory being “discovered” by a researcher devoid of intellectual and experiential bias, and Strauss on the other side with a methodology that is prescriptive to the point where inherent bias is greatly mitigated.

Regardless of which three versions of grounded theory one looks to (and more are in development), it relies on two basic pillars: constant (cyclical) comparison, and categorization (coding) of data, whether the data is qualitative, quantitative, or a mix of both. As one samples data, there is a constant comparison taking place within the process to begin “coding” the data as a means to provide organization. As data collection grows and substantiates the initial coding, there will come a point where there is enough data (and codes) to develop categories by which the data can be organized. This leads to more focused data collection and comparison, which continues in iterative cycles until the researcher can postulate a final core *concept*. Once the researcher has collected enough data to where it seems to bear little/no additional influence on the core concept, they can then offer a theory on the nature of their observations. The following diagram illustrates how a grounded theory study might unfold:

⁶⁹ *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 10.

⁷⁰ *The Qualitative Report*, 6.

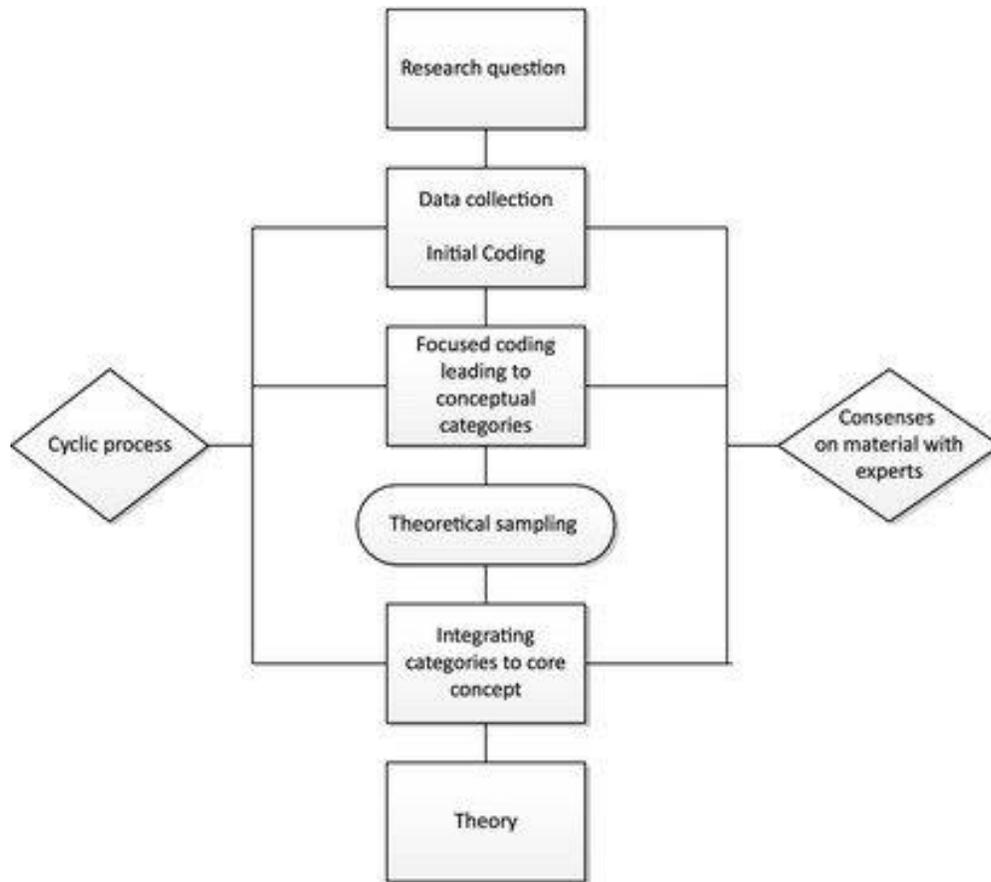


Figure 1 - Grounded Theory Method⁷¹

One starts with a broad research question, collects initial data on the subject, and determines how to initially assign coding to the data, refines/categorizes, with the goal to achieve enough data to develop a single concept. This then leads to a proposed theory.

What then makes the most sense for this specific study? When one looks carefully at Glaser’s classic model, it is clear his process is quite “unhinged” and maximally abstract in its approach. In other words, though Glaser is not trying to dismiss the importance of processes and methods, his model carries strong emphasis on holistically recording/coding what is being

⁷¹ Image retrieved from ResearchGate, accessed June 1, 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-grounded-theory-process-according-to-Charmaz-17_fig2_274723747.

observed, while simultaneously eliminating bias from the process (hence the pure *discovery* of theory mentioned earlier). For Glaser, “all is data” and there is little (if anything) that cannot be used in terms of theory development, which at first glance seems reasonable enough. However, his approach carries a distinct caveat; it has to *begin* devoid of any review of the literature previous to data collection. Taken to its extreme, this ideal would render this researcher as tainted in Glaser’s view simply because of the literature reviews already conducted throughout this researcher’s academic efforts thus far (to say nothing of the literature reviews leading up to this specific study). Though the openness and freedom characteristic of Glaser’s classic approach carries an appeal, it has been deemed it too abstract for this study.

The Straussian model by contrast is prescriptive to the point where it does not readily fit the objectives of this study either. This is not to suggest anything negative regarding its validity as a method, however due to its shift away from Glaser (putting the focus towards qualitative data sources), it constrains the researcher’s ability to take a larger perspective on the various data sources available on the subject. The Straussian model also is also much more rigid in its coding methodology; the researcher begins with open coding, progresses to axial coding (categorization of codes based on conditions, context, etc.), and finally moves to selective coding (core categorization – final category). The postulated theory then emerges from this final category. If the emerging data fails to satisfy this framework, it can result in a “dead end” for the researcher.

Revisiting Kathy Charmaz’ perspective, she employs grounded theory primarily from a constructivist viewpoint. She defined her constructivist position originally in her book *Constructing Grounded Theory* (now in its second edition)⁷² and has been deeply involved in

⁷² Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 2nd ed, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2014).

grounded theory development. In an interview given in 2013, Charmaz affirmed that from the beginning (despite the harsh disagreements between Glaser and Strauss), both were aware of the possibility that grounded theory could easily evolve and adapt to changing times, environments, and research needs.⁷³ Her approach represents one of those evolutions; she recognized both the work of Glaser and Strauss in terms of their means to conduct research. However, her constructivist approach recognized that the research collection/analysis process cannot be separated from the researcher.⁷⁴ She affirms the sentiment expressed earlier with regard to the potential problems with Glaser's means of "discovery" from an alleged objective viewpoint. The idea that theory will emerge from the data and in no way be influenced by the researcher themselves was rejected by Charmaz. Instead, she affirms that instead of making a claim to have no "starting points or standing points," the researcher must acknowledge them and work through those inherent biases in a manner that will minimally effect the research process and theoretical conclusions posited.⁷⁵ To say that Charmaz combines the best of both Glaser and Strauss is probably a misnomer; rather that she has recognized the strengths of them both and integrated influence from them both to develop the theory further.

At any rate, this study leans more heavily on Charmaz' constructivist perspective of grounded theory primarily, while also embracing one critical element of Glaser: all is data. As such, this study does not constrict the inquiry from a qualitative lens. The results from both qualitative and quantitative studies will be gathered and analyzed throughout. Before delving

⁷³ "A Discussion with Prof. Kathy Charmaz on Grounded Theory," interview by Graham R. Gibbs, *BPS Qualitative Social Psychology Conference*, 4-6 Sept, 2013, University of Huddersfield, U.K., accessed June 1, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5AHmHQS6WQ>

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

into a detailed methodology, there are a few important concepts noted by Charmaz that bear mentioning that were positively affirmed during the data collection phase:

- One must acknowledge and define their starting points/standing points (i.e. biases)
- A defined starting point must be clearly established (topic & initial codes)
- Define what one means by “theory.” Is it positivist/objective? Or more abstract?
- Grounded theory is inductive as a process, but likely abductive in its findings
- Grounded theory does not necessarily offer verification, rather it provides plausibility⁷⁶

It is the position of this study that indeed, a researcher brings their own views, biases, experiences, etc. to the process that impacts how one consumes, analyzes, and interprets data.

Hence this study leans heavily on Charmaz’ perspectives on grounded theory for the methodological foundation. Some additional worldview discussion and definitions are in order however to give additional context.

Worldview Elements

As mentioned earlier, this study embraces Sire’s definition of a worldview, though only partially. We have yet to cover the specific traits of his worldview construct. Here again is his definition:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously,

⁷⁶ Ibid.

consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.⁷⁷

In his earlier editions of his sister publication *The Universe Next Door*, Sire posited seven questions that speak to “sets of propositions.” These are fundamental questions that one needs to wrestle with in shaping a worldview. In his latest edition he adds an additional question.⁷⁸ He asks:

- What is prime reality – the really real?
- What is the nature of external reality?
- What is a human being?
- What happens to a person at death?
- Why is it possible to know anything at all?
- How do we know what is right or what is wrong?
- What is the meaning of human history?
- What personal, life orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?⁷⁹

They are very daunting questions, irrespective of whether someone has them answered for themselves or not. Other worldview characterizations offer similar questions. For example, Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias narrows down worldview through the answers to four questions, offering a more condensed (yet comprehensive) manner that a worldview must answer

⁷⁷ *Naming the Elephant*, 141.

⁷⁸ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 5th ed, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 23. In his latest edition he notes that he added the eighth questions to better articulate “commitment” and the “matter of the heart.”

⁷⁹ *Universe Next Door*, 20-23.

(Origin, Meaning, Morality, and Destiny).⁸⁰ However one frames the questions, the commonality that surfaces is that developing a worldview takes on a natural progression in both epistemological and existential terms. The questions move from both notional “beginnings” for being and knowing, and progress to the eventual “endings” of being and knowing. In other words, worldview questions cover the matter of life and living from cradle to grave. Such an introspection (even for someone who has answered such questions) still challenges the intellect and the soul. They are heavy issues for everyone no matter one’s worldview, and arguably one of the reasons that the concept of worldview poses the difficulties that it does. For his eight worldview questions, Sire observes that:

When stated in such a sequence, these questions boggle the mind. Either the answers are obvious to us and we wonder why anyone would bother to ask such questions, or else we wonder how any of them can be answered with any certainty. If we feel the answers are too obvious to consider, then we have a worldview, but we have no idea that many others do not share it.⁸¹

Sire’s position on this is compelling. He asserts that the sequence of developing one’s worldview (in addition to the content) has a dramatic impact on the end result. As such there is at least an implication that, depending on how effectively these questions are answered, this sequence will bear a heavy impact on the commitment one has to what they profess to believe. This study leans on a similar notion; how one sequences worldview development (and the

⁸⁰ Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, “What Is a Worldview? Ravi Zacharias on Origin, Meaning, Morality, and Destiny,” accessed 15 July, 2020, <https://www.rzim.org/watch/video/what-is-a-worldview-ravi-zacharias-on-origin-meaning-morality-and-destiny>

⁸¹ *Universe Next Door*, 24.

necessary propositional logic involved) at the very least will exert significant influence on whether those propositions will be developed independently, co-dependently, or interdependently. Though Sire's propositions are very helpful in bringing the breadth and depth of worldview thinking to the surface, this study employs six slightly different propositions to provide the initial coding used to gather the research. These six propositions (or worldview elements) were chosen for a number of reasons.

First, although Sire provides a very in-depth look on the concept with his epistemological framework, his propositions are phrased in a manner that is highly philosophical both in their inquiry and presentation. There is little missing from his perspectives in this researcher's view. However, because of their labeling it was decided they would be difficult to form initial coding for the research. Second, depending on the audience of the research (particularly quantitative/survey studies) that targets broad demographics, the philosophical depth of most questionnaires will likely not delve too deep into one's "soul," for the lack of a better term. Survey respondents need to be engaged at a pragmatic level in terms of questioning in order to gather data on a broad population, particularly if the educational and/or socioeconomic demographics vary considerably. This serves to potentially (and unnecessarily) narrow down the potential sources of data collected for the study. Lastly, because this study focuses on Christian *youth*, it seemed appropriate to focus the inquiries on subjects/questions that are (whether subconsciously or otherwise) occupying much of their existential struggles. Simultaneously, these worldview elements offer questions that may not truly be asked deeply by young people. Put another way, it is one thing to experience a spiritual, emotional, mental, or existential crisis and have it consume your life; it is quite another to ask oneself the right question, at the right time, with the right context to figure out why the crisis exists in the first place.

The methodology for this study utilizes six propositions for worldview development and integration, influenced by Sire and other thinkers. Summarized in one statement, a worldview needs to explain *the origin, purpose, value, desired behavior, observed behavior, and destination of humanity*. Though not as philosophically laden as Sire and others, these propositions all share one important commonality: being human. Segmented into separate worldview elements, the six questions ask:

- Where does humanity come from? (Origin)
- What is humanity supposed to do? (Purpose)
- Should humanity be here? (Value)
- How should humanity behave ideally? (Desired Behavior)
- How does humanity behave in actuality? (Observed Behavior)
- Where does humanity go? (Destination)

We will of course look at how these six questions manifest throughout the study in later chapters. First, we need to revisit Sire's perspective briefly.

Even though our chosen questions are different in their verbiage, this researcher strongly affirms the significance of Sire's assertion that "sequencing" of worldview inquiry (at least from a philosophical perspective) speaks to a strong propositional logic.⁸³ This layering/building of a worldview in this manner gives someone the ability to form a view on life that is much larger "than the sum" of the individual claims it maintains. Note that the first and last of the six

⁸³ Propositional logic, also known as sentential logic and statement logic, is the branch of logic that studies ways of joining and/or modifying entire propositions, statements or sentences to form more complicated propositions, statements or sentences, as well as the logical relationships and properties that are derived from these methods. Accessed 1 June, 2020, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/prop-log/#:~:text=Propositional%20logic%2C%20also%20known%20as,and%20properties%20that%20are%20derived>

propositions in the worldview elements both start with “where” questions. The remaining questions form a bridge between origin and destiny; how one answers the questions of origin and destiny establish a starting and finish line anchored on a like foundation. The other questions inform the pathways, actions, and movements used to finish the race; they are those worldly realities that bring us from birth to death— and everything in between.

This truly is the heart of the matter; a worldview should not only speak to our existential reality, but also to a reality that goes well beyond it (even if it is a six-foot hole in the ground). This harks back to what Pascal articulated in his work on the wager—the idea that if one lives a fulfilled existence in the physical realm pursuing God (albeit the slight chance they might be mistaken as to his existence), who would ultimately remain behind to worry about it one way or the other? Family? Friends? Perhaps their negative feelings and experiences should not be relegated or diminished, however it distracts from the fundamental issue. The individual soul making such a decision certainly will not be around to ponder, worry, or express regrets about their life. Why then are two thirds of Christian youth pulling away from a wager that, even from pure pragmatics, stands only to earn the gift of eternal life, and lose nothing if it fails?

Of all the beings who have (or should have) the greatest stake in the matter of worldview, who are they? In the estimation of this researcher, it truly should be every one walking on the earth; they *all* bear the image of their Creator whether they realize it or not. Each individual has no choice but to wrestle with the reality that, no matter how they observe their world, there will come a time when they will be observing it no longer. Every soul has the greatest stake in the matter because no matter one’s worldview, they will all spend eternity *somewhere*. All share the utmost assurance of returning to the “dust of the earth” knowing it is the point of no return (Gen 3:19). In fact, it is the only element that all worldviews share in common agreement—physical

death. With that said, our discussion shifts to the methodological framework used for the study to find where other agreement (and disagreement) truly lie.

Methodology

As was touched on briefly earlier, some definitions are in order. When we speak of grounded theory, the broad framework has already been addressed. However, for the purposes of this study, “theory” (as a standalone term) is defined in a more abstract manner. To quote Charmaz again on her grounded theory, she notes that (in contrast to a positivist view)⁸⁵, theory can mean “abstract understanding, linking concepts together, seeing relationships, and understanding the world.”⁸⁶ These six questions were chosen because they all relate to back to experiences of humanity and easily relate to each other. The challenge is breaking them down from the research; how are these questions being answered through the experiences of Christian youth? Are they related/linked to other questions in some way (i.e. independent, codependent, etc.)? Again, this broad look at the research is not intended to arrive at a “grand” theory that offers either definitive explanation of what is happening to our Christian youth, nor offer predictions of the future. The goal rather is to identify either: apparent correlations between the experiences of youth in both religious and secular contexts, or notable gaps in the data so future researchers might endeavor to fill those gaps.

Our initial coding for worldview elements was broad in the sense that, as research studies, surveys, and databases were queried, an early need arose to easily and efficiently catalog what the general findings/trends observed were, and to be able to easily discriminate across the

⁸⁵ A positivist view of theory is (in Charmaz’s words) “explanation and prediction.”

⁸⁶ “A Discussion with Prof. Kathy Charmaz on Grounded Theory.”

different codes. This resulted in a research tracking matrix that could be easily organized, filtered, and analyzed after data collection. As an example, when one thinks of the first question (human origins), there are certainly many ways individuals could frame it. It could be formed from a purely theistic perspective, an atheistic one, or any multitude of mixed/blended answers and/or explanations for us being here. However, to simplify the initial data collection, two categories to code this question were used: transcendent and non-transcendent. For example, if the source showed indications towards a result/finding where the sample, survey group, or interviews were indicative of moving away from a transcendent first cause of humanity, then the source was coded “non-transcendent.” Similarly, the question of destination was coded transcendent/non-transcendent. The remaining four questions were coded with differently, but with a similar intent. Human purpose, for example, used the terms “intrinsic/extrinsic.” Does humanity have a purpose that resides “hard wired” in us (intrinsic), or does humanity have to impose purpose onto ourselves/others externally (extrinsic)? The full list of questions and code pairings is as follows:

- Origins (Transcendent – Non-Transcendent)
- Purpose (Intrinsic – Extrinsic)
- Value (Intrinsic – Extrinsic)
- Morality (Intrinsic – Extrinsic)
- Nature (Intrinsic – Extrinsic)
- Destination (Transcendent – Non-Transcendent)

All of the sources were cataloged and coded according to the findings of the study, dataset, survey, etc. as indicative of whichever worldview elements were present. Often due to the

multidimensional nature of the data sources, multiple worldview elements were represented. This resulted in multiple codes being recorded for a single source. By contrast, if a worldview element was not represented within the source (or was largely irrelevant to the overall conclusion noted within the data/study), the code blocks for that element were simply left blank. However, many sources (though not directly used for the matrix itself) were maintained for later review/use in the broad development of the thesis. In addition to the six worldview code columns, data was recorded by source, type, religious or secular, youth/all ages, as well as a final column to record hyperlinks, primary findings, percentages, and notes of interest either pertaining to the study itself, codes used, potential linkages/similarities to other codes, etc. The following is a small screenshot example of the matrix:

SOURCE	Religious/Secular	Youth or All	Origins	Purpose	Value	Morality	Nature	Destination	Findings/Notes/Memos/Hyperlinks
Barna (Competing Worldviews Influence Today's Christians)	Religious	Youth	Transcendent	Extrinsic		Intrinsic		Transcendent	Speaks strongly to a mixing (blending) of beliefs that seem to be betraying orthodox Christian doctrines. https://www.barna.com/research/competing-worldviews-influence-todays-christians/
Barna (Only half of Protestant pastors have a biblical worldview)	Religious	All	Non-Transcendent	Extrinsic	Extrinsic		Extrinsic	Non-transcendent	Ties into another study specifically on pastoral worldview development. https://www.barna.com/research/only-half-of-protestant-pastors-have-a-biblical-worldview
Barna (Changes in Worldview Among Christians over the Past 13 Years)	Religious	All	Transcendent		Intrinsic		Intrinsic	Transcendent	Remarkable results in biblical worldview thinking, only 9% of professing Christians with a holistic biblical worldview. https://www.barna.com/research/barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years

Figure 2 - Research Matrix Example

Conclusion

It was recognized early on that a potential trend and/or significant finding might manifest within one of the worldview elements very early, and would have to be accounted for. To ensure any potential shift in the data collection and coding would not occur too soon (thereby not identifying other potential significant trends), it was decided that no such shift in data collection/analysis towards any one (or group of) worldview elements would occur until all six worldview elements were represented in some manner across at least 10 data sources. This was

done to mitigate the possibility of the initial data unintentionally directing the analysis away from worldview elements too soon and was largely successful. The following chapter will detail the data collection process, provide an overview of the research results, discuss the positive and negative outcomes from the methodology used, and conclude with some initial implications of the trends noted in the data.

CHAPTER 4 – DATA COLLECTION AND RESULTS

Introduction/Research Overview

To briefly recap earlier discussion, the data collection strategy was designed to look at the development and integration of worldview through both religious and secular “lenses” as related to six elements of a worldview. Those elements again are as follows:

- Where does humanity come from? (Origins)
- What is humanity supposed to do? (Purpose)
- Should humanity be here? (Value)
- How should humanity behave ideally? (Desired Behavior)
- How does humanity behave in actuality? (Observed Behavior)
- Where does humanity go? (Destination)

The data collection phase explored both quantitative and qualitative data sources, which across the process was met with varying degrees of success. Although the initial intent was to definitively catalog a source as either religious or secular, as the data collection proceeded from religious “sources” to those of an apparent secular bent, the distinction between the two became increasingly difficult to define. For instance, a specific source might have originated from a distinctly religious oriented organization (i.e. Barna Group, LifeWay Research, etc.) yet the subject matter was predominately speaking to an issue that presented itself as distinctly secular in nature. Conversely, sources that were not distinctively religious/Christian in nature (i.e. Gallup, Pew Research) sometimes would present their research and/or findings that predominately spoke to the religiosity, faith patterns, or other characteristics of the sample that retained an exclusively

religious perspective. Fortunately, this tension was identified early in the collection process and additional considerations were developed to bound the research. Broadly speaking, instead of attempting to rigidly force any source into a particular category, the following test was used to determine whether a source belonged in the “religious” or “secular” category: does the *content and subject* focus the majority of its effort on a matter that is either primarily religious, or secular, in nature? In other words, if a non-religious organization researched a topic where the subject and content were clearly measuring religious patterns within the study, it was catalogued as a religious study, and vice versa. This was the only problematic aspect identified during data collection, and by addressing it in this fashion, ultimately the research matrix was further refined to provide greater detail on the content of each source.

Although multiple sources of data were given an initial review for inclusion in the research matrix, predominately only three types of data made significant contributions to the matrix: original works in the form of doctoral dissertations, journal articles, and research surveys. Video/audio sources predominately proved to be overly abstract to catalogue with any degree of accuracy. Additionally, many variables and/or questions within much of the video content causes one to beg other questions as to whether they were focused enough to include in the study. Once this issue was identified, the decision was made to constrain the data collection exclusively to written media, which primarily was found within academia. Within the final research matrix, a couple elements were seen as being statistically significant across the board. To that end, the following analysis breaks down not only the overall results from the data collection, but also explores the specifics as they relate to the initial research questions at hand, as well as the broad implications the data suggest.

Across the six worldview elements investigated, this researcher examined a total of approximately 1,200 doctoral dissertations, academically peer reviewed journal articles, and research surveys across a timeframe going back no earlier than 1990 for potential inclusion the study.⁸⁷ In total, 82 of these sources were logged and included within the research matrix. It should be noted that not all 82 sources contributed *directly* to the six worldview elements in question, nor were categorized across the six elements. However, all 82 were retained to not only provide additional context for thesis and theory development, but also add to the scope of resources for future researchers.

As anticipated, sources examined often had multiple worldview elements that either represented a significant/direct aspect within the study itself, or indirectly represented the worldview element based on overall context of the content and research. The following table illustrates a general representation of the six elements noted in the research in their totality, irrespective of their specific codes:

Origins	Purpose	Value	Morality	Nature	Destination
32	16	18	19	12	31

Table 1 - Research Matrix Results (Total)

There was a noteworthy disparity in the available research from a religious perspective as compared to the secular. This result in itself is not necessarily surprising. After all, it is doubtful that many researchers within mainstream academia are overly concerned about college youth becoming more acquiescent to a secular worldview. In any case, the amount of research on the

⁸⁷ However, the vast majority of the data represented in the research matrix does not eclipse beyond the year 2000. The few sources that go back this far were primarily analyzed to gain a greater understanding/context on their respective subjects.

subject even within the smallest disparities was almost fourfold represented in the realm of religious research versus secular. The following table illustrates those representative differences:

	Origins	Purpose	Value	Morality	Nature	Destination
Religious	27	15	17	18	11	26
Secular	5	1	1	1	1	5

Table 2 - Research Matrix (Religious vs. Secular)

There is an important caveat to note on this data; it does not suggest that very little research is being done in the realm of religion within secular circles. On the contrary, there is a fair amount of research being conducted on the subject.⁸⁸ However, for the purpose of this study, there were far fewer linkages to the six specific worldview *elements* being investigated within the secular focused research versus those from a religious perspective. Again, it is this researcher’s view that this should not come as a surprise. It is simply worth noting the number of research efforts specifically discussing (or bearing implication) on the nature of worldview on the religious front far outweigh those from the secular.

Although there is a decent amount of data to potentially be garnered from other mediums not included in this study (i.e. audio/video/podcasts), the data sampled illustrates a concerted effort by researchers (who predominately are represented within the doctoral student population) to view this subject as worthy of continued research. The following table shows said effort across the total number of sources noted in the research matrix by type:

⁸⁸ Several of the sources retained in the research matrix illustrates this fact; much of the research (albeit primarily from a secular perspective) is being conducted within the academic disciplines of sociology and anthropology.

Dissertations	Profession Journals / Research Surveys⁸⁹
44	38

Table 3 - Research Matrix (Dissertation vs. Journal/Survey Breakdown)

The amount of research being conducted not only within doctoral realm, but also the general realm of academic/quantitative inquiry was a welcome note from the research. Additionally, the amount of survey data available for review was substantial as well, and although much originated from religious research organizations, non-religious affiliated pollsters (i.e. Pew Research Center) also look at religious issues on a fairly regular basis.

Methodology Review/Limitations

The most relevant question from this study however speaks directly to the methodology employed, and the central question originally posited at the beginning; are there any patterns and/or trends noted during the data collection to point to any causality for the secularization of Christian youth? The simple answer is anything but simple; the result was a mixture of yes and no. The grounded theory employed in this study did not fully achieve the anticipated results originally conceived in the form of a refined coding framework; a path to refined codes (based on the data reviewed) simply failed to present itself. However, there were general trends noted in the research matrix that nevertheless established some interesting findings. These findings did offer useful information as to the potential underlying causes of youth secularization (as well

⁸⁹ To simplify the visualization within the matrix, journal articles and survey data were combined together, as they generally represented sources that contained predominately quantitative data results.

lending to the theory offered). First however, let us start by reviewing the negative results from the research.

Although the goal of this grounded theory effort was to refine (and potentially redefine) a coding scheme to conduct further refined/focused research, the review of the available data simply did not yield an honest, definitive pattern from which refined coding could be determined nor implemented. This result could be viewed in a multitude of ways. The obvious initial reaction may be an unfortunate conclusion; perhaps grounded theory is simply insufficient for approaching such subject matters and/or types of research. This might be the case. However, it seems more likely that grounded theory in the manner used with this *specific* inquiry may simply have come up short. There are a couple of potential reasons for this.

First, recalling back to the discussion on the different types of grounded theory, it is entirely possible that, had a more Glaserian-type of “freedom” in the data collection been employed, additional trends would be noted (i.e. more inclusion of other forms of media such as podcasts, news, etc.). Second, if a Straussian method were rigidly employed at the beginning of the research process, early coding may have produced a refined research focus early enough to where the vast majority of the effort would have been on axial coding/refinement—leading to a theoretical model more easily and with less effort. In either case however, the challenge remains the same; how does a researcher remain open minded on a topic (while being open handed with the research), yet simultaneously avoiding the possibility of becoming “empty headed” because the subject is too broad to pin down?

For this study, this serious challenge remained at the forefront during data collection and became increasingly obvious as this phase started coming to a close. Despite those challenges however, and despite the fact that a refined schema of coding was not achieved, the process did

yield useable trends in the findings. The process also offered some insight on how grounded theory might be effectively employed in future religious-based research efforts. This will hopefully (and prayerfully) assist future researchers looking at this topic. With that, the following trends were noted from the research.

Findings

Referencing back to Table 2, two worldview elements stood out within the body of research considered: origin and destination. In total, origin accounted for 32 occurrences, with destination coming in at 31 (compared to 16, 18, 19, and 12 occurrences for purpose, value, morality, and nature, respectively). As much of a disparity as this is, there is more of a disparity when the coding is taken into consideration. As recorded by worldview element and code, the following table illustrates worldview perspectives that are leaning heavily towards a non-transcendent implication for both origins of life, and destinations after death:

	Transcendent	Non-Transcendent
Origins	10	22
Destination	10	19

Table 4 - Transcendent vs. Non-Transcendent

Although the overall results to be highlighted in the final chapter of this study largely does not include the numbers from the other four worldview elements, the aggregated numbers from the research matrix for the remaining elements showed similar trends in some cases:

	Intrinsic	Extrinsic
Purpose	6	10
Value	9	9
Morality	7	12
Nature	5	7

Table 5 - Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic

Overall, the results/findings from the sources logged displayed much less strength/disparity in these four worldview elements. This was partially due to the fact they simply were observed to a lesser degree than both origin/destination overall. Additionally, these four elements of worldview proved to be more complex to observe and categorize. It was clear from the analysis of the final matrix that these “in-between” worldview elements were not only less likely to be directly observed, but also more difficult to record.

It should be noted again that many of the 82 studies reviewed and included in the research matrix were not cataloged across any of the worldview elements being investigated. This does not imply that they were unimportant to the research. On the contrary, the two primary elements of note gained a great deal of context from studies/sources that were not included as directly addressing origins, as an example. The overall findings from the research on both origins and destination are twofold.

First, the majority of the research effort is occurring within the realms of a religious context/organization. Second, the majority of the findings point towards a greater acceptance of the general notion that, not only do our origins come from a non-transcendent cause (i.e. an accident of an amoral cosmos), but our departure from our physical existence bears nothing of significant consequence either. In other words, our existence is an accident, therefore our

ceasing to exist is simply this accident failing to allow eternal life; humanity is simply doomed to a hole in the ground. Any semblance of a “fountain of youth” has yet to be discovered, so therefore we are inevitably doomed to physical death no matter what.

Such a view on life is antithetical to the true Christian. Scripture is very clear that life is “good” in the eyes of God, going so far as to call the results of His work “very good” in the narrative of creation (Gen. 1:31). Scholars comment that the concept of “very good,” from the context in the original Hebrew, is not merely being exceedingly good in a relative sense. Rather, it is expressing (in English terminology) the “the very best that it could possibly be.”⁹⁰ In addition, the Hebrew used to convey the creation of humans presents a much more personal involvement than merely calling forth something into existence; God creates humans by *forming* them, as a potter does with a mound of clay. This not only is indicative of the unique and special role that humanity would bear, but also that we harbor a “soul” that bears the image and likeness of God.⁹¹ It shows an intimacy with His creation, and bears with it a love and care like nothing else in the created order. Jesus describes this as well in the gospels, noting that “Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows” (Matt. 10:29-31).

One of the most fundamental and profound truths laid out in Scripture therefore is God’s love and desire to commune with His creation; humanity is not an accident of an amoral, unidentified first cause. Rather, the first cause is knowable, relatable, relational, and though not

⁹⁰ Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham, eds. *The Moody Bible Commentary*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 39.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 40. The Hebrew adjective where the word “formed” comes from in the English translation is *yoser*, which is to describe the intimate proximity of the potter forming the clay.

completely visible to us as was originally intended, He reveals Himself to us in ways unlike any other created being through the person of Jesus Christ—God dwelling with His creation.

However fundamental this truth of Christianity is, this research effort yielded a disturbing general trend; fundamental truths once easily articulated by Christians are no longer fundamental in a scholastic sense. They now manifest as complex (and apparently difficult to embrace) ideals among its supposed adherents. If even the basics of the Christian faith are not being fully understood by our youth, then there is a serious problem being laid at the feet of this generation of elders, pastors, educators, and parents; we have to figure out where the gaps lie and endeavor to close them.

Will all the young Christians remain steady in Him? Of course not; apostasy is alive and well today just as it was thousands of years ago, and will be until His return. Jesus is clear about that, where in the last days “many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and mislead many” (Matt. 24:10-11). Ultimately, having been created in His image as individuals with free agency and a soul (Gen. 1:26-27), every youth will have to make their choice about who Jesus is.

However, many Christian young people may simply be confused, scared, uninformed, and so forth. If they find themselves at a crossroads in their lives where nothing makes sense anymore, where up is down and down is up, it seems reasonable many might feel the only path out is to step off the path—to go “off of the way” as Bunyan aptly describes it in his classic.⁹² In other words, if youth are getting beaten up hard on the path to the point where they simply desire

⁹² John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, updated ed. (Abbotsford: Aneko Press, 2014), 20. Such is the theme of the entire story; Christian Pilgrim struggling through the various potential paths to rid himself of his burden of sin and death, just to constantly be reminded that there is only one path to follow—the path of Christ.

to get off the beaten path no matter the costs, it implies at the very least they may not fully understand (nor appreciate) what that cost truly is.

As broad as this research was, it nevertheless revealed a trend that the greatest source of confusion (perhaps not just for young Christians, by the way) is one of where humanity comes from, and where it is headed. In the next chapter, these two worldview elements will be explored in greater detail. In addition to offering a broad theory on what these two elements show, a greater context that includes the other four elements will also be presented.

CHAPTER 5 – THEORY ON YOUTH SECULARIZATION

“The real trouble with this world of ours is not that it is an unreasonable world, nor even that it is a reasonable one. The commonest kind of trouble is that it is nearly reasonable, but not quite. Life is not an illogicality; yet it is a trap for logicians”⁹³

~ G.K. Chesterton

Introduction/Theory

In his work on Christian orthodoxy, Chesterton begins exploring the paradoxical nature of the Christian faith. Broadly speaking, his point is that, when everything makes sense and the truth is easily discovered logically and rationally, at once there is a sharp turn in the road where logic and rational thought take a back seat, yet the truth of Christianity remains despite those sharp turns. He goes on to describe this tension where he says this:

Suppose some mathematical creature from the moon were to reckon up the human body; he would at once see that the essential thing about it was that it was a duplicate. A man is two men, he on the right exactly resembling him on the left. Having noted that there was an arm on the right and one on the left, a leg on the right and one on the left, he might go further and still find on each side the same number of fingers, the same number of toes, twin eyes, twin ears, twin nostrils, and even twin lobes of the brain. At last he would take it as a law; and then, where he found a heart on one side, would deduce that there was another heart on the other. And just then, where he most felt he was right, he would be wrong.⁹⁴

⁹³ G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 123.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 123-124.

Most can probably relate to Chesterton's opine, even if not necessarily from a spiritual perspective. Who has not found themselves in a situation where they firmly believed they had everything figured out? The package arrived, parts inventoried, instructions read completely, steps followed meticulously, just to reach an unexpected turn in the road where everything you thought you understood has been upended to the point where the entire set of instructions (and perhaps the package itself) is called into question.

This conundrum harks back to the initial discussion of Agent Jay and his struggles in trying to make the monumental decision to accept that which all his senses were screaming to be truth about the reality of alien life. Yet, the one part of him lacking a clone (his heart) was initially unyielding because, like all of us, until we are permanently removed from the forces that hold supremacy over this world mentioned by Paul (Eph. 6), our struggle continues. Paul speaks directly to this tension as well, and it deserves reflection; "but if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me" (Rom. 7:15-17).

There is an ugly truth to these words from the Apostle; the indwelling nature of sin on humanity is inescapable in this world, despite anyone's best effort. If one dares to trace their sin nature back to the very beginning, a common observation surfaces. All believers may seek truth and understanding, yet paradoxically run head on into walls of sin, confusion, lies, and despair. Few may desire to face such walls directly, but the fact remains; all will eventually run directly into a wall at some point in their life. These walls are not necessarily a bad thing. They cause one to reflect not only on where the boundaries exist on one's life, but also on where those boundaries perhaps *should* exist on one's life.

This is arguably where Christian youth find themselves today—at an unforgiving crossroads where truth is surely still desirable, yet seemingly unknowable. However, there remains an existential gap that needs to be filled with *something* in order for their lives to keep moving forward, even if that solution might be a subtle (or not so subtle) lie. Assuming that this assertion is at least plausible, is it also possible that anything loosely filling such a gap will suffice? Admittedly, this is not a comfortable assertion. Yet as the adage goes, if the shoe fits, wear it for a while to see where the steps lead. Such are the steps that will be taken in this next section.

This chapter recounts earlier discussion on worldview as a concept, takes a detailed look at the two worldview elements highlighted from the research, and posits a theory on the nature of Christian youth turning away from the faith. After reviewing the research matrix results, reflecting on additional literature on the subject, and personal experiences both within and outside the study, this researcher came to the following theory statement:

Several youth within the church today embrace distinctly inconsistent views of the world, characterized by a “Christian incoherence,” which causes varying degrees of individual cognitive dissonance, resulting in Christian distance.

This statement obviously needs to be unpacked and explained in greater detail. Before getting to the theory itself, Sire needs to be revisited and his definition of worldview, along with an explanation that within this definition, it is a helpful supplement to break up one’s worldview development process into three steps in order to thrive as disciples. This allows for a framework that naturally puts order around how one conceptualizes a holistic worldview, ultimately allowing for an integrated, rational, and fulfilling Christian life to manifest itself (view of the world, view of Christ, view of life).

World View, Christ View, and Life View

Here again is Sire's definition:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.⁹⁵

Again, this is a compelling definition because it encompasses most (if not all) individuals in one manner or another. One person may hold to views more consistently than another, perhaps more consciously, and so forth. Sire leaves no individuals, groups, cultures, religions, etc. out of the picture; all can be incorporated into this definition in one fashion or another. There is however, a slight issue that requires attention for the problems facing church youth.

The Christian is called to believe in the absolute truth of the person of Jesus Christ. This requirement is not given to believers in some vague, ambiguous form of "pirate rules" (i.e. being more like guidelines) rather than hard and fast rules. It is an absolute claim, as Christ said in one of the seven "I Am" statements in John's gospel, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Jesus did not say *a* way, or *a* truth; He said *the* way. It is an exclusive claim not only to His divinity, but to the very nature of truth itself. Jesus did not leave room for ambiguities, discrepancies or inconsistencies in his claims. They are absolute and clear.

Although Sire provides for inconsistencies and discrepancies to be noted and analyzed for individual worldviews (to include Christians) in his definition, simultaneously this aspect of the

⁹⁵ *Naming the Elephant*, 141.

definition lacks in addressing the needs for an integrated worldview that facilitates an actual fulfilling, Christian life. This is not meant to imply that this definition *should* directly address this issue; merely that it is a philosophical exercise more so than a pragmatic one. Nevertheless, integrating one's views into daily life needs to be addressed.

Believing in God merely scratches the first itch of developing a worldview; coming to a point where one actually formulates that “foundation on which we live and move and have our being” is the itch that admittedly even the most learned and mature of Christian disciples will struggle with until they pass into glory. Leaning on that foundation and standing firm is certainly a struggle; it is a daily, hourly, sometimes a minute to minute strive to not stumble on that “stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone” (Ps. 118:22). For young Christians who have been clearly (and empirically) shown to be stumbling, the elephant in the room and major question for them as individuals is this: If you identify as embracing the label of Christian; what label likewise have you given to Christ?

One may call themselves a Christian, just as easily as they could call themselves (or others for that matter) a patriot, a Democrat, a capitalist, a fascist, or a racist. Calling oneself a Christian does little to establish who someone truly is. Neither does it rectify a crucial issue for one's life both in this realm and the one to come; what (or who) do they call Christ? In other words, what is their “Christ view?” Was he the raving mad lunatic Lewis talks about? Something worse?⁹⁶ If not, then He was exactly who he claimed to be; Creator God and Lord of all. So again, one may profess to be an adherent of the Christian faith (or worldview). Yet, one's *clearly articulated, unambiguous* view of Christ will quickly reveal their individual being

⁹⁶ C.S. Lewis *Signature Classics*, 51.

as authentic—or not. Like Lewis argued, one has to make a choice about Christ because His very words, actions, and being give us no choice.⁹⁷

Having decided upon who Christ is, then a final issue comes to the forefront; what does one do now? What does the deity of Christ truly mean in the scope of one's actual daily living? How does He shape, mold, and grow in and through one's life? If Christian youth have not satisfactorily worked through this process (which for our purposes this final step will be referred to as "life view"), then frankly it seems reasonable to conclude that the falling away of young people from Christ is what should be expected. Saying in passing that one is a Christian, goes to church, sings a few hymns, prays occasionally, etc. is one thing. Arriving at a definitive, authoritative, and coherent conclusion as to who Christ actually is, and how that matters for one's life, is another matter entirely.

This was discussed earlier but warrants mention again; if there is no individual, personal *ascription* of truth to the person of Jesus Christ in someone's life (whether young or old), then the truth likely does not live in that person. They have merely *subscribed* to an identity and nothing more. That is what Jesus spoke of in being "born again" of something beyond the existential nature of our earthly lives (John 3); something begins to happen in the heart and soul of a believer that transcends a mere temporal understanding bound by an innate, human finitude. This rebirth of the soul and spirit of a believer in Christ is essential. Without it, one is merely a Christian in name only.

Sire's definition gives us a decent framework with which to wrestle with this abstract concept of worldview. However, one cannot merely address and/or deal with abstractions alone and get to a holistic, livable existence in the world. Hence it is useful to break down the abstract

⁹⁷ Ibid., 50.

nature of worldview into a few manageable, articulable steps that lend themselves to more easily map out the life of a Christian. These three parts have already been discussed; visually the order one might approach this framework looks like this:

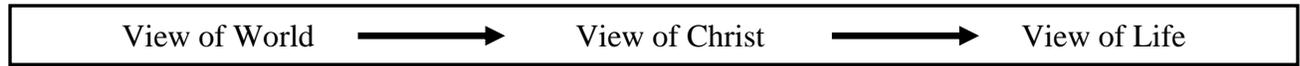


Figure 3 - Worldview Progression (World/Christ/Life)

This diagram shows an order of operations if you will; first things first, then second and so on.

One cannot simply label themselves Christian and expect to find comfort or solace in such a label. At best, such an approach is absurd for anyone who knows even an elementary history of the first century Christian church; being a disciple was not exactly an existence of worldly comfort and solace. At its worst, this approach is blatant heresy against what Scripture has to say on the subject. “Not everyone who says to Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter . . . and I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness” (Matt 7:21-23).

Paul also speaks to this issue; “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? . . . For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth” (2 Cor. 13:5-8).

This lends back to the earlier discussion on truth; if truth is not part of the equation for a believer, and the truth does not live within, then the “Christian” is anything but; they are in name only someone who has *subscribed* to something that is either true or false, without *ascribing* the required propositional truth to the person of Christ. Things must be orderly, and for our purposes, addressed in order to come close to a holistic, disciple-oriented understanding (and fundamental orientation of the heart) towards Christ. Viewed another way, the process of ascribing truth to Jesus looks something like this:

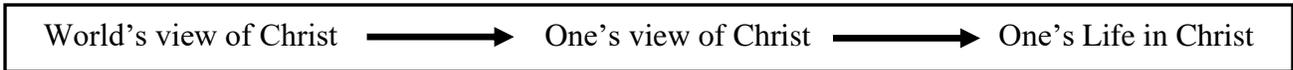


Figure 4 - Progression from viewing to living Christ

There are several views around the world as to who Christ was and/or is today, which does not require much overview here. Where this becomes important however is one's individual choice on what to do with the person and deity of Christ. Then (and only then) can one move beyond those more abstract components of defining their worldview to a position where a pragmatic, holistic life view *by, in and through* the person of Jesus Christ comes to fruition. It begs the question then: is this what we are observing in the growth and maturity of church youth? Research on multiple fronts seem to indicate otherwise.

In this researcher's estimation, this is the central issue at hand; young people are offering their subscription to something (that is either true or false, and cannot be definitively proven scientifically), without coming to a reasonable conclusion for themselves as to whether it is actually true or not. Is it any wonder then why the secular culture is yielding the results being observed in the data? J.P. Moreland describes it in this way:

But if faith and reason are polar opposites, and if discipleship is private and sacred but college studies are public and secular, then training the intellect will not be valued as part of teenage mentoring. That is why our discipleship materials often leave Christian young people vulnerable to atheistic college professors with an ax to grind. For such professors, shredding an intellectually unprepared undergraduate's faith is like shooting fish in a barrel.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ J.P. Moreland, *Love your God with all your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul*, 2nd Ed (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012), 23.

What say then of the theory offered earlier? The two worldview elements noted from the research first require additional development.

The ordering of worldview concepts/questions is an important aspect to developing said worldview in total. To take a balanced look at the world simply cannot exist in an abstract vacuum of randomness. Where, when, and how one answers the biggest questions in life will bear heavily on the actual answers offered, internalized, and the conclusions reached. Even though this study employed different questions to base the research on, it nevertheless affirms Sire's position that the order in which we answer worldview questions will have a profound impact on the end result. The same can be said for the six elements chosen for this study and was highlighted by the research results which showed the first and last worldview elements being observed two-fold more often than the others. Consider how these questions might nest together:

- Where does humanity come from? (Origins)
- What is humanity supposed to do? (Purpose)
- Should humanity be here? (Value)
- How should humanity behave ideally? (Desired Behavior)
- How does humanity behave in actuality? (Observed Behavior)
- Where does humanity go? (Destination)

The first question again is one of "where," as is the final question. These two questions are of course heavy in the realm of ontology. Though we exist, we cannot owe that existence to anything related to our present being; someone (or something) had to bring us into being. Hence the first question of our origins, once answered, has no choice but to transcend our existence.

This is true regardless of one's belief in God; no one can explain their own existence from within their inherent being. Rather, it came about from without their being; it is completely outside of

the control of the individual. Taken far enough back into history, humanity cannot categorically prove to itself the definitive nature of its origin. Whether one believes in a supreme creator or not is beside the point; both positions are taken based on faith.

The final question bears similar implications. Although humanity for the most part universally agrees on the reality of physical death, the debate of course is whether physical death is the only end that humanity can count on. It is another “where” question that ultimately has to be taken on faith as well. Either physical death is merely the end of everything about a person, or there is something about a person that transcends physical death. Of course, then the issue becomes where did they go if there *was* something left?

Origin and destination encapsulate everything else about (and relating) to both our physical and spiritual existence. This is not to imply that the other four worldview elements are unimportant—far from it. However, these two “where” questions serve to surround and anchor someone on how those four remaining elements will manifest. The following visual may help illustrate this more clearly:

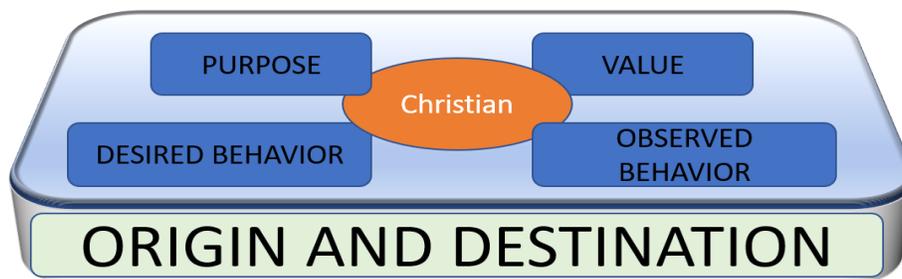


Figure 5 – Worldview Foundation Illustration

The four worldview questions of purpose, value, and behaviors both desired and observed obviously play a key role in one’s daily life, and they are by no means mutually exclusive of each other. The critical key here however is that how one derives their answers to these four

questions are inextricably linked to the foundational “where” questions of worldview. Again, the ordering is important. As an example, a brief answering of these six in total from a follower of Christ might look like this:

- **Where does humanity come from?** *Answer: The personal, powerful, creative act of the living God who still works in the lives of humans today.*
- **What is humanity supposed to do?** *Answer: Provide stewardship over God’s creation, thereby bringing glory to God in the process.*
- **Should humanity be here?** *Answer: Humanity was destined to exist in God’s plan to bring glory to Him, therefore is ascribed a unique value in the sight of God.*
- **How should humanity behave ideally?** *Answer: In a manner that is in keeping with God’s holiness, perfect nature, holy character, and humanity’s divine purpose on Earth.*
- **How does humanity actually behave?** *Answer: The free will/sinful nature in a fallen humanity results in unholiness, undesirable behaviors, and ungodly character in this world, resulting in perpetual violations of divine purpose.*
- **Where does humanity go?** *Answer: An eternal existence either in the presence of God, or in separation from God.*

Conversely, if these answers were provided by someone subscribing to a naturalistic worldview, one would expect different answers along lines of reasoning that would herald evolution, Darwinism, self-gratification/glorification, human moral progress relying on one of many forms of secular humanism, and of course the end of the human condition as a deep hole in the ground.

Answers to these questions from atheistic, pluralistic, and/or naturalist perspectives typically result in multiple instances of inconsistency, incongruence, or incoherence in one form or another. As an example, for the atheist arguing against the existence of God because of all the

pain, evil, and suffering observed in the world, by necessity they must make an absolute truth claim that evil, pain, and suffering are inherently wrong—carrying with such claim intrinsic moral “wrongs.” However, there is a problem. Such a claim is difficult given that atheists, naturalists, and the like do not typically lay claim to absolute truth, nor even subscribe to absolute truth as being a thing at all to begin with. For such philosophies, everything in life (supposedly) is relative to the individual and/or culture, therefore no absolutes exist.

Hence it presents the atheist with a fundamental problem of logic; you cannot make an absolute truth claim without an ontologically based absolute—a reference point from which to make a comparison. It plainly illustrates the absurdity of life without God, which William Lane Craig put this way:

If there is no God, then man and the universe is doomed. Like prisoners condemned to death, we await our unavoidable execution. There is no God, and there is no immortality. And what is the consequence of this? It means that life itself is absurd. It means that the life we have is without ultimate significance, value, or purpose.⁹⁹

When absolutes are removed from one’s view of the world, their view of Christ quickly becomes itself an exercise in incoherence, to save nothing for anchoring a practical outlook on one’s life itself. Paul speaks to both this absurdity described by Craig, as well as the critical importance of Christ’s resurrection in one poignant verse to the church in Corinth, where he said “if from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does that profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (1 Cor. 15:32).

What Paul is basically saying here is that, if we assume there is no hope outside of this temporary, fragile shell of a body, then serving a God (who at least logically speaking, should

⁹⁹ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 72.

then not exist) is simply foolishness; one might as well live it up and wait to meet the inevitable hole in the ground just waiting for us all. However, in typical fashion for the great apostle, Paul goes on to quickly caveat this assertion by quoting more OT Scripture to the Corinthians, saying that we will exchange morality with immortality, the perishable with the imperishable; through Christ's victory over death on the cross, our own mortality is now "swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54). This being the case, embracing Paul's thought-provoking statement from 1 Cor 15:32 is not actually tenable. One cannot eat their philosophical (nor spiritual) cake and have it too; they must decide which path to take. Secularists do it all the time, however.

So then, there seems to be potential conundrum facing Christian youth. They are either unwilling to fully strip themselves of *long standing*, comfortable identities (or ideologies) of the past in favor of more practical labels given their evolving knowledge and/or environment. Or worse perhaps, they are embracing an *initial* identity (or ideology) for the simple reason that they never had one to begin with, and now must fill that philosophical gap with something regardless of what it is—so long as they feel comfortable with it. Either way, it poses a fatal potentiality where Christian youth then find themselves in no better position than their secular friends. They too suffer from incongruent, incoherent, and inconsistent perspectives and manifestations in their individual lives. If this is the case, then the exclusive, objective truth of salvation in Christ disappears; both the confused Christian and secularist find themselves on the exact same road to the inevitable destination, "for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:13-14).

This brings our discussion back the theory statement posited earlier; there is an incoherence manifesting within church youth (and potentially across several age groups, quite

frankly) that lends to existential and philosophical conflict—ultimately resulting in the rejection of the Christian life. Though this conflict could certainly manifest itself in several ways, most are beyond the breadth and depth of this study. Only one specific manifestation (cognitive dissonance) will be explored as the potential cause here. With that, the remainder of the discussion in this chapter will breakdown and address the theory statement in three parts: Incoherence, Dissonance, Distance.

Christian Incoherence

Although this source was not included in the research matrix, during the data collection this researcher came across a seemingly random video clip featuring a panel discussion mixed with academics, activists, and politicians. At one point when the subject turned to the matter of religion and faith, one of the panel members replied to the question as to whether she believed in God, and her reply (paraphrased) was that she was “a Christian and a Marxist.” At the moment, despite the obvious absurdity of a statement on Christianity that in no fundamental way can be reconciled with Marxism, the comment was initially dismissed as an outlier exclaimed by a blatantly ignorant activist. After additional reflection however, an underlying question did beg itself in the background as data collection progressed: is this (and other) instances of incoherence actually obvious to the Christian community? As it turns out, the data reflected in the research confirm that this is not the case.

A study that was mentioned briefly earlier talked about competing worldviews that face Christians today, and merits additional discussion. It specifically noted that 36% of respondents accept ideas that are rooted in Marxist ideology.¹⁰⁰ The breakdown of the data is fascinating:

¹⁰⁰ “Competing Worldviews Influence Today’s Christians,” Barna Group, accessed June 1, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/competing-worldviews-influence-todays-christians/>. This study was a mixed demographic in many regards, yet showed more sympathy against Christian thoughts in the younger ages.

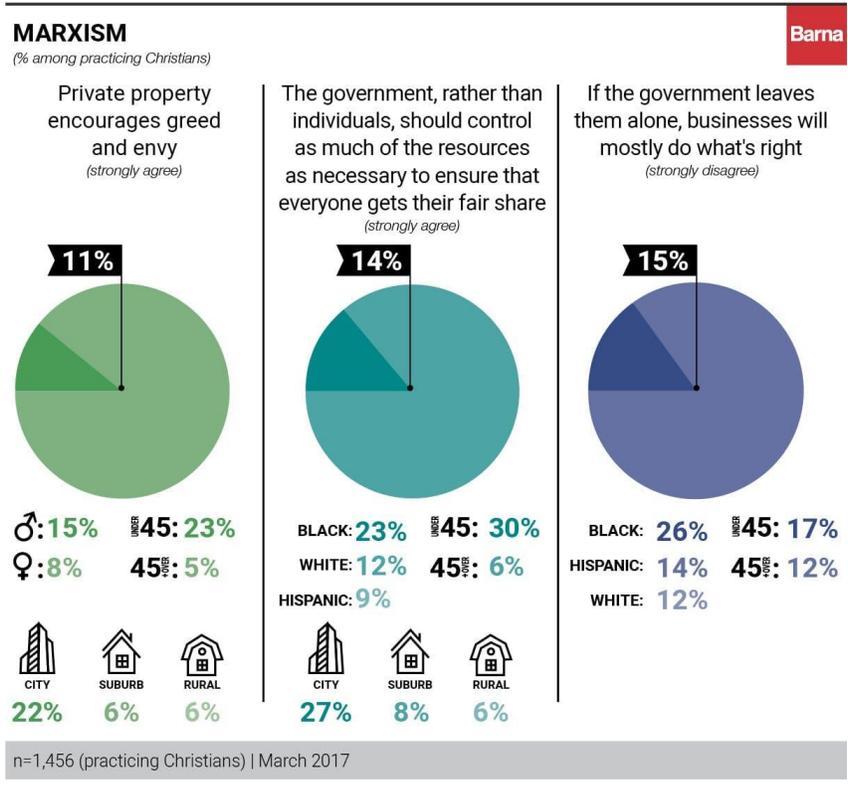


Figure 6 - Barna Group: Marxism¹⁰¹

One of the commentators on the study made the following observation regarding the research:

The challenge with competing worldviews is that there are fragments of similarities to some Christian teachings, and some may recognize and latch on to these ideas, not realizing they are distortions of biblical truths. The call for the Church, and its teachers and thinkers, is to help Christians dissect popular beliefs before allowing them to settle in their own ideology.¹⁰²

The ideology of Karl Marx and others who espoused an ideology surrounded by social/economic class struggle is antithetical to a Christian worldview. The following table illustrates core incompatibilities, utilizing our six worldview elements:

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Worldview Element	Christianity	Marxism
Origins	Theistic (God is Creator)	Atheistic (Man is Creator)
Purpose	Worship/Glorify God	Worship/Glorify Materials
Value	Bestowed by God	Bestowed by State/Gov't
Behavior (Desired)	Spiritually Focused	Materialistically Focused
Behavior (Observed)	Spiritually Fallen	Materialistically Deprived
Destination	God's Kingdom	State Kingdom (Utopia)

Table 6 - Christianity / Marxism Comparison

As noted by one online question and answer ministry, “Marxism is ultimately about material things; Christianity is ultimately about spiritual things.”¹⁰³ Even though it should be noted that, technically, Marxism is not a religion, the ideology nevertheless fills the vacuous void that religion leaves when it is ultimately abolished under a Marxist system—which by design is inherently atheistic. It exalts the nature of man to a struggle purely grounded in materialistic necessity at the forefront, whereas Christ clearly dismisses this in several verses, saying “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal . . . no one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth” (Matt. 6:19-24). Jesus does not ignore material needs, rather puts them in their proper place, going on in Matthew saying “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your

¹⁰³ “Is Marxism compatible with the Christian faith?” Got Questions, accessed July 15, 2020, <https://www.gotquestions.org/Marxism-Christian.html>.

heavenly Father *knows that you need all these things*. But seek *first* His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matt 6:31-33, emphasis added).¹⁰⁴

There are countless references in Scripture that are in direct conflict with Marxist ideas, however one of the best refutations to any compatibility of Marxism with Christianity comes from Marx himself. In his landmark manifesto, he says:

When the ancient world was in its last throes, the ancient religions were overcome by Christianity. Then Christian ideas succumbed in the eighteenth century to nationalist ideas, feudal society fought its death battle with the then revolutionary bourgeoisie. The ideas of religious liberty and freedom of conscience merely gave expression to the sway of free competition within the domain of knowledge. Undoubtedly, it will be said, religious, moral philosophical, and juridical ideas have been modified in the course of historical development. But religion, morality, philosophy, political science, and law constantly survived this change. There are, besides, eternal truths, such as freedom, justice, etc., that are common to all states of society. But communism *abolishes eternal truths, it abolishes all religion, and all morality*, instead of constituting them on a new basis; it therefore acts in *contradiction to all past historical experience*.¹⁰⁵

Despite the fact that the very authors of Marxist ideology spelled out clearly that such ideas are unapologetically in conflict with religion and the ideas that come with it, the research clearly shows incoherent trends with what those ideas mean to Christians of today. This reality would be almost laughable if it were not true. Sadly, the reality is that several efforts to effectively

¹⁰⁴ As a side note, this entire chapter of Matthew even taken alone should make any Christian take pause when considering the veracity of any form of Marxism (whether it be cultural, philosophical, economical, etc).

¹⁰⁵ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Communist Manifesto” in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 Karl Marx and the Communist Manifesto*, trans. Martin Milligan (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1988), 229, emphasis added.

blend the ideal notions of a utopian, classless society with Christian theology have been attempted at great length, and still are being attempted to this day.

However, Marxism is not the only incoherence of ideas within the church; over half (54%) of the Christian responses to the same research shows leanings towards ideas characteristic of postmodern thought.¹⁰⁶ Like Marxism, these ideas are again incompatible with a holistic, biblical worldview. We will dispense with a detailed exploration of postmodernism for the sake of brevity; the several ideas nested within postmodernism (like the other subjects noted in the Barna research on Marxism, secularism, New Spirituality, etc) are too immense to adequately discuss at length here. However, Groothuis sums up the term by well, saying that “postmodernism holds that truth is not determined by its connection to objective reality but by various social constructions devised for different purposes.¹⁰⁷ For postmodernists, truth is not objective (nor exclusive), rather it is subjective, relative, and inclusive. The breakdown of that research from the same Barna study is also quite revealing:

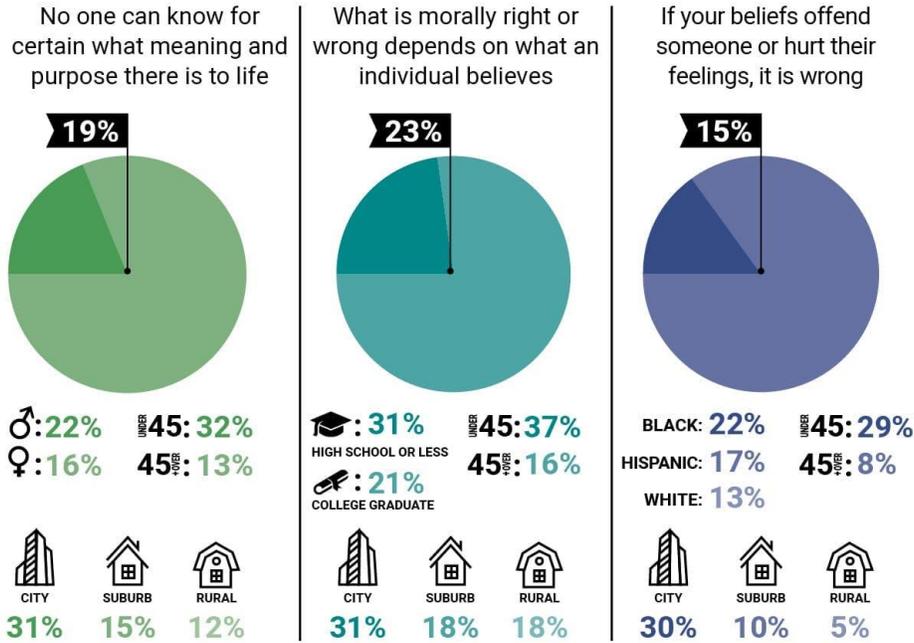
¹⁰⁶ “Competing Worldviews Influence Today’s Christians,” Barna Group, accessed June 1, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/competing-worldviews-influence-todays-christians/>.

¹⁰⁷ Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 128.

POSTMODERNISM

(% among practicing Christians who strongly agree)

Barna



n=1,456 (practicing Christians) | March 2017

Figure 7 - Barna Group: Postmodernism¹⁰⁸

This again smacks at the core of Christian theology; Jesus cannot objectively be the way, the truth, etc. and simultaneously simply one of *many* ways to truth in the world depending on what an individual believes or thinks. As noted by Moreland and Craig, this would be a violation of basic, propositional logic; it is akin to saying that the number 2 is both an even number and an odd number. One premise or the other can be true, but not both at the same time and in the same sense.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, the major religions of the world cannot be fundamentally similar and only different in superficial details (despite attempts to advertise them as such). Even within the three primary monotheistic religions representing the vast majority of the world's population

¹⁰⁸ "Competing Worldviews Influence Today's Christians," Barna Group, accessed June 1, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/competing-worldviews-influence-todays-christians/>.

¹⁰⁹ J.P. Moreland & William Land Craig, *Philosophical Foundations of a Christian Worldview*, 2nd ed, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2017), 120. This law of logic is known as the law of non-contradiction.

(Christianity, Islam, and Judaism), the characterization of this supreme, single deity within these various traditions are fundamentally incompatible with each other.¹¹⁰

The other two elements of the Barna study (secularism and New Age Spirituality) are certainly worth a read and reflection, yet are not necessary for now to make the overall point; there is an obvious discrepancy between what Christian youth say on one hand, and believe on the other. This incoherence is extremely problematic with regard to the spiritual development of Christian youth and is only serving to undermine the nature of absolute truth claimed by Christ. The more multiplied one's incoherent conceptualization of the world becomes, the greater the obscurities to seeking (and discerning) truth become.

There is an important caveat to mention here; this researcher is not suggesting that coherence alone is the measure of truth. Groothuis notes this in agreement, that while coherence is a helpful measure of truth, it only does so in the negative sense.¹¹¹ Coherence alone cannot get one to the truth. However, as one's beliefs become increasingly incoherent in their totality, so too does the ability to actuate them in everyday living. This leads to the second portion of the theory statement; the potentiality (and effect) of cognitive dissonance.

Cognitive Dissonance

To address this concept, we have to step across the hall to visit practitioners who largely fall outside of epistemology, ontology, and certainly theology. Cognitive dissonance is primarily explored within the field of psychology; it is a theory which states that if one harbors one (or

¹¹⁰ This is not meant to imply that Judaism is divorced from Christianity; merely that the understanding of God is vastly different between those of orthodox Jewish traditions, and those originating at the foot of the cross of Christ.

¹¹¹ Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 133. Groothuis puts it this way, saying that "coherence or logical consistency cannot be what makes a truth claim true, although logical coherence is a necessary and negative test for truth. That is, if a worldview contains core beliefs that contradict each other, that worldview must be false."

several) conflicting ideas regarding the nature of their reality (which then have to subsequently be reconciled), the individual will experience varying degrees of emotional and psychological stress/discomfort. The initial development of this theory originated in the work of social psychologist Leon Festinger, who through his work made a simple yet profound observation about humanity from a social perspective; we do not like inconsistency.¹¹² It is from this basic premise that cognitive dissonance theory anchors itself; people do not tolerate inconsistency well, and due to this the individual will often go through some process in an attempt to either resolve the inconsistency, or remove it. The end goal is to restore the psyche back to a steady state of normalcy and comfort, which itself is fairly straightforward. However, there is more to the theory than a simple desire for individuals to feel comfortable.

Cognitive dissonance is actually the combination of two concepts, which starts with cognition. A cognition is “any piece of knowledge a person may have. It can be knowledge of a behavior, knowledge of one’s attitude, or knowledge about the state of the world.”¹¹³ The dissonant aspect comes into play when two cognitions come into conflict with each other (which by the way, is closely related to the law of non-contradiction). The pair of cognitions is inconsistent if one cognition follows from the obverse (opposite) of the other.¹¹⁴ As an illustration, Cooper recounts an event that Dr. Festinger observed to illustrate the underlying nature of his theory. The account is somewhat verbose, but worth reflection:

An article that appeared in a Minneapolis newspaper gave Festinger and his students an ideal opportunity to study inconsistency in a real-world setting. The article reported on a

¹¹² Joel Cooper, *Cognitive Dissonance: Fifty Years of a Classic Theory*, (London: Sage, 2007), 2.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

group of west coast residents who were united in a belief about a significant event: the belief that the Earth was going to be annihilated by a cataclysmic flood on December 21, 1955. All of the people would perish in the cataclysm except for those who believed in the prophecies emanating from the planet Clarion; they alone would be saved from the flood.

Festinger reasoned that if Earth survived December 21, then the people in the little group, dubbed The Seekers, would face a considerable amount of inconsistency on the next morning. While the rest of the world awoke to just another day, The Seekers would face a calamitous amount of inconsistency. The world's very existence would be inconsistent with their belief that the world as we know it was to have ended on the previous evening.

The Seekers was a serious group: this was not a collection of individuals who had a mild premonition of the world's demise. Their beliefs were specific and strong. As the December day approached, Seekers members sold their possessions and quit their jobs. Some, whose spouses did not share their beliefs, divorced. The Seekers members were united in their support of their leader, Mrs. Marion Keech, who believed she was the medium through whom the unearthly beings on the planet Clarion communicated their wishes. She received her messages through automatic writing – a paranormal belief that a person's hand is seized by the spirits in another world and is used to communicate messages from the Great Beyond.

Clarion was specific. The group was to gather at Mrs. Keech's home on the evening of December 20. They were to await the arrival of a spaceship that would come to Earth and whisk the group away from danger. The Seekers were not publicity hounds.

They sought no attention for their beliefs or their prophecy. When the reporter whose story appeared in the Minneapolis newspaper attempted to interview them, they grudgingly gave only the briefest interview. Publicity was not their goal; protecting themselves from the cataclysmic end of the Earth was.

As a social psychologist, Festinger saw the immediate relevance to the theory he was generating. If people are driven to deal with inconsistency, how would Marion Keech and her followers react to the morning of December 21 when the sun rose, the sky brightened, and the spaceship from Clarion failed to appear? The clear and specific anticipation of the world's demise, the elaborate preparations for the group to be saved, the broken marriages and other personal sacrifices, all would stand in stark contrast to the world's having made just another turn around its axis. Festinger and his colleagues predicted that the dramatic inconsistency would create the state of cognitive dissonance and the group would be driven to find some way to reduce it. They would need to find some way of restoring consistency to their mental maps of the cosmic events.

One of the researchers, Stanley Schachter, infiltrated the group. He carefully observed the group's preparations and specifically observed the events as they unfolded just after midnight on December 20. The group gathered near midnight, waiting for the arrival of the spacecraft. Tension and excitement were high. They had followed the Clarions' instructions meticulously. Mrs. Keech's grandfather clock ticked the final seconds to midnight. No spacecraft. Someone in the group checked his watch and saw that his watch still read only 11:55. All watches were reset. At 12:05, even by the ticking of the newly set watches, there was still no spacecraft. Another member of the group suddenly realized that he had not fulfilled all of the instructions given by the Clarions.

They had insisted that all metal objects be removed from the human space travelers. Thus, they came with no zippers, belt buckles, or bra straps. But now a Seeker realized that he had a metal filling in a tooth. He removed it. Still, no spacecraft.

There followed a terrible few hours following the midnight disconfirmation of the prophecy. People sobbed and wept. Had they been abandoned by the Clarions? Had they been wrong all along, just like their more cynical spouses and former friends had told them? Shortly past 4:00 am, Mrs. Keech received her final message from Clarion. The message provided the answer to their questions, and also provided the opportunity to restore consistency between their doomsday beliefs and their observation that the spaceship had not come and there had been no Earth-destroying cataclysm.

A message shows the path ... to restore consistency. The Clarions' final message was brilliant. Through Mrs. Keech's trembling hand, it said:

‘This little group, sitting all night long, has spread so much goodness and light that the God of the Universe spared the Earth from destruction.’

So that was it. The beliefs had not been wrong after all. God had been planning to destroy the Earth. All of the preparations for the cataclysm had not been in vain. In fact, it was precisely and only because of the preparations, sacrifices, and faith of the group that the Earth still existed on the morning of December 21. The sun still shone because of them; people went to work because of them; people still had homes to return to and families to love them ... all because of the determination of the small group of Seekers.¹¹⁵

A fascinating piece to this story is, prior to that fateful day of December 21st, Festinger made a specific prediction that, although this group initially shied away from any notion of public

¹¹⁵ *Cognitive Dissonance: Fifty Years of a Classic Theory*, 2-5. Emphasis original.

notoriety and the like, that model would flip quickly once the prediction failed to come to pass, which that is exactly what happened. The group quickly went into the public domain and formulated their narrative based on a *negative* occurrence of apocalyptic event, all in attempt to resolve what Festinger postulated from the beginning.¹¹⁶

There are a few key observations to note from this account. First, the group in question anchored themselves on a propositional truth that was seemingly unshakeable. These individuals sacrificed everything in order to accomplish what was necessary in their minds. Second, their belief in what they thought to be true had absolutely no bearing on whether it was actually true or not; the messages from Clarion through their leader were (for better or worse) absolute truth. Finally, what this group did when the prophecy failed to come true is the most fascinating. It might be very easy to assume that, on the surface, they philosophically “doubled down” so to speak in their lunacy in an effort to perpetuate the false nature of their beliefs to a larger audience. In all actuality, what this group did was eject their core beliefs *entirely*, substitute them with a completely new belief system (now that the false prophesy has been flushed away with the Clarion’s inability to show up), and claimed the liberty to mold their group identity and/or ideology to whatever they deem necessary to suppress the cognitive dissonance predicted by Festinger. In a way, it was a win-win situation for the group psychologically. Spiritually however, it is hard to imagine a greater loss amongst souls that likely were sincerely attempting to discover, follow and cling to truth. Yet, as sincere as they were, they were sincerely wrong.

¹¹⁶ Although this story loosely carries an eschatological flavor to it, it is not offered in any way to be viewed or compared to biblical end times prophecy; they are simply incomparable. Given the archeological and textual evidence for the events recorded in the Old Testament, if the flood had *not* occurred after the 100+ years it took for Noah to build the Ark, it seems reasonable that such a prophetic embarrassment would have been recorded—as were other events that false prophets predicted would happen in Scripture, yet did not take place.

Festinger's fundamental theory incorporates the fact that millions of cognitions exist for everyone, many of which will not relate to one another, nor are important to others. These cognitions, being individual and often compartmentalized pieces of information, could be as unrelated as knowing that vegetables are good for you, and that is also prudent for one to do a great deal of research before making a large, expensive purchase for their household. For the cognitions that do relate to each other however, the consistency between them can become very important depending on the level of discomfort that it causes.

Hence there is the issue of magnitude; how *powerful* is the dissonance? Is the discomfort relatively minor (e.g. perhaps believing in always telling the truth, but then telling your five-year-old child that their pie was delicious)? Or is the dissonance so powerful that one's life must change drastically in one fashion or another (i.e. Agent Jay, a Christian college student, etc.) before the individual can proceed with their life? Magnitude is important, and bears significance for this study. When an individual discovers a dissonant relationship between two cognitions, they have a few options. The following example will serve to illustrate.

Suppose Kenny is part of an organization dedicated to providing campaign support to a political candidate running for reelection. The core belief of the organization is that "grassroots" engagement with the community is required to turn out the vote, which necessitates door to door solicitation—a belief which Kenny agrees with wholeheartedly. However, though Kenny maintains his membership in the organization, he ends up visiting very few homes during his tenure. Midway through the campaign, the organizational leadership hosts a progress meeting with all the members and request verbal reports on numbers of residences visited thus far. Other members start speaking around the room in turn, reporting numbers in the hundreds. Kenny starts to feel uncomfortable. The numbers keep pouring in, and it is not looking good for him.

Though the numbers admittedly vary greatly, they are all at least in the hundreds, and it is almost his turn to speak. Kenny has only visited a dozen homes over the first few months of this important campaign, and that is only because they were close to where he lives. Kenny also has a firm belief in telling the truth no matter what the cost, yet his discomfort is growing stronger as all of a sudden, it is his turn to report. Now what?

This is cognitive dissonance; tension and anxiety between beliefs that fail to line up in the mind, life and existence of an individual. Kenny has a few choices to make of course; he could tell the truth and accept the discomfort and potential embarrassment, lie to get through the moment, or refuse to say one way or another. Regardless of how he responds, the dissonance is not resolved. Even if he were to lie in the moment, Kenny would merely increase an additional tension on his belief that he should not lie—with the other tension regarding his door to door effort remaining unresolved. He is in a lose-lose situation, where no matter what he will feel compelled to resolve his discomfort.

The simplest way for Kenny to address his problem (regardless of the outcome in the meeting) is to hit the streets and perform up to both his expectations as well as those of the organization. This would result in a simple reduction of dissonance, and his discomfort levels would subside. Another option would be for Kenny to reduce the level of importance his support to the campaign effort exerted over his life, which would reduce the dissonance without having to offer a greater commitment/effort. Finally, there is an additional path, which Cooper describes as a sort of counteracting force to lower tension¹¹⁷ against the dissonance with an appropriate cognitive *consonance* (i.e. a cognition that represents harmony versus tension). In the case of Kenny, he could approach his tension by justifying his inadequate door to door

¹¹⁷ *Cognitive Dissonance: Fifty Years of a Classic Theory*, 8.

solicitation by saying to himself, for example, “I do engage several people during the week on politics, to include promoting my organization and the candidate we support. I engage just as many people that way as I would knocking on doors (or close to it), so that’s good.”

What Kenny has done is instead of simply dealing with the tensions between two cognitions, introduced an additional cognition to offset the impact the other two were having on his psyche. Now the plot thickens, so to speak; no longer does the obvious problem remain in an obvious category. Kenny now has retained the importance of his membership with the organization, while simultaneously relieving himself of additional efforts on his part in order to prove his commitment, by elevating the relevance of another cognition that in reality has little to do with the actual commitment.

With regard to the issue of magnitude, both the importance of the discrepant cognitions and consonant cognitions ultimately determine the overall magnitude of one’s dissonance. Cooper notes the following formula that details this relationship¹¹⁸:

$$\textit{Dissonance Magnitude} = \frac{\textit{SUM (all discrepant cognitions x importance)}}{\textit{SUM (all consonant cognitions x importance)}}$$

Cooper details Festinger’s general dissonance model as the total magnitude is proportional to the discrepant cognitions a person has, however is inversely proportional to consonant cognitions, where both are weighed by their importance.¹¹⁹ While psychological concepts such as this are not truly mathematical in nature, it serves to make the point; if someone enjoys a greater importance and/or number of consonant cognitions to offset the discrepant, then the overall magnitude of one’s dissonance is greatly reduced (or potentially eliminated entirely). By

¹¹⁸ *Cognitive Dissonance: Fifty Years of a Classic Theory*, 9.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

contrast, if one holds several relatively unimportant consonant cognitions, while also a small number of highly important discrepant ones, dissonance magnifies.¹²⁰

Recalling the results shown through the research, the two worldview elements of origin and destination exhibited general trends; survey respondents and dissertation conclusions lean more favorably in a direction towards the non-transcendent. In other words, the trend is moving more towards scientific naturalism versus supernatural creationism. This result in itself again was not necessarily a surprise; general observations of political policy, academia, and the greater culture seem indicative of that. However, culture is only explainable to the extent that one can explain the role of an individual in that culture. For Christian youth specifically, the fact their environment often shifts towards an increased exposure to secular ideas is also no surprise.

The statistics noted earlier by Barna showing almost two thirds of undergraduates renouncing their faith at the end of four years indicate something dramatic happens beyond simple exposure to ideas that are against the Christian faith. The reasoning/s for this statistic is likely complex and not reducible to any single variable, or even a few variables. However, with regard to what has been discussed thus far on cognitive dissonance, the following factors and research studies deserve consideration as plausible contributors to the potential dissonance of Christian youth.

First, although the subject of declining biblical worldview knowledge was discussed in general terms across a broader demographic, the trends within the youth specifically has yet to be mentioned in detail. In a comparative survey analysis conducted by Barna group in 2009 (data collection occurring in 1995, 2000, and 2005), it was discovered that, not only did a very small

¹²⁰ It should be noted that Cooper's review of the theory shown thus far is quite basic, and does not cover much of the significant shifts in the theory over the course of the 50 plus years (as the title suggests) of its evolution, improvements, etc. This is merely an introductory view on the subject.

portion of all adults have a biblical worldview (9%), when they broke out the 18-23 age group, the number of respondents who had a biblical worldview was less than one-half of one percent (.5%).¹²¹ This implies then that almost no Christian youth have a firm biblical understanding *before* they even show up to the university campus.

Second, even if strong biblical understandings were set aside for a moment to focus on the possibility that youth still appear to be Christians (albeit undereducated ones), that line of reasoning yields results that are no better. In a separate study, Barna showed that while respondents affirming atheism across demographics were fairly level for most age groups, they spike *sharply* for the youngest generation. The following chart shows more than double of the respondents from Gen Z (aged 13-18) identify as atheist compared to Millennials:

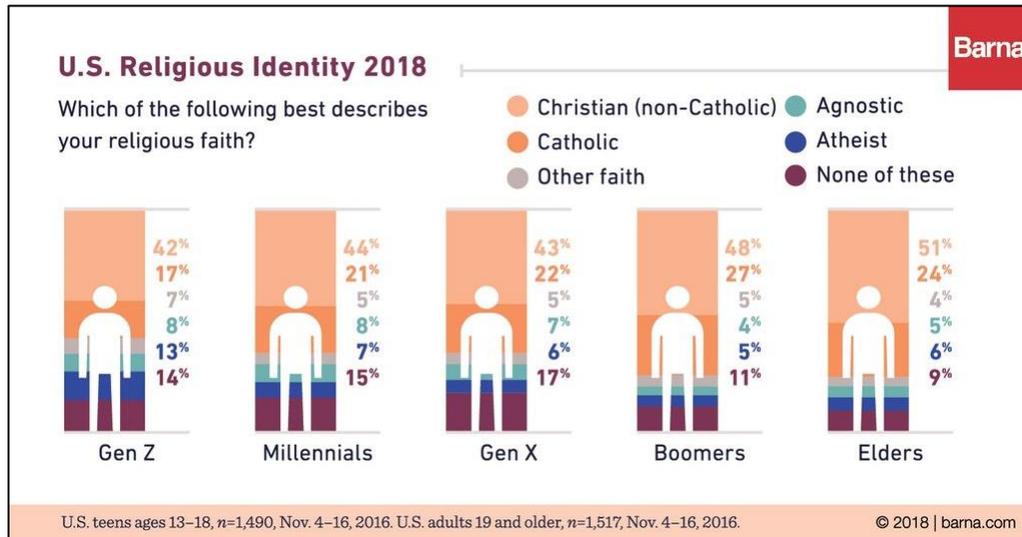


Figure 8 - Barna Group: Atheism Doubles¹²²

¹²¹ “Changes in Worldview Among Christians over the Past 13 Years,” Barna Group, retrieved 15 July, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years/>. Although this was an older study with data going back to 1995, based on other survey data (as well as the results shown in the research matrix), it seems highly unlikely that this drastically low number has improved.

¹²² “Atheism Doubles Among Generation Z,” Barna Group, retrieved 15 July, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/>

Lastly, in addition to the incongruent beliefs noted earlier in terms of Marxism, postmodernism, etc., survey data suggests that several other potential sources of cognitive dissonance exist simply from ignorance and/or serious misunderstanding of biblical truth. A 2009 Barna study illustrated several trends across several Christian doctrines. A few of the more concerning ones are noted below:

- Almost half (47%) of the Christians who believed that Satan is merely a symbol of evil, nevertheless agreed that a person can be under the influence of spiritual forces such as demons.
- Almost half (49%) of those who agreed that the Holy Spirit is only a symbol but not a living entity, also agreed that the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches, even though the Bible clearly describes the Holy Spirit as more than a symbolic reference to God's power or presence.
- About one-third (33%) of the self-defined Christians who agree that the Bible, Koran and Book of Mormon all teach the same truths, simultaneously contend that the Bible is totally accurate in its principles, even though the three sacred books have very different ideas about truth, salvation, and the nature of God.¹²³

These are not obscure, trivial, or inconsequential matters of Christian doctrine; these are elements of core doctrine essential to the Christian faith. George Barna made the following observation concerning the results of the study:

¹²³ “Most American Christians Do Not Believe that Satan or the Holy Spirit Exist,” Barna Group, retrieved July 15, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/most-american-christians-do-not-believe-that-satan-or-the-holy-spirit-exist/>. The study does note that respondents who were identified as “born again” Christians did fare better overall with their responses, although only marginally.

Most people understand that America’s religious life is diverse . . . a majority of Christians are generally open to maintaining relationships with people of other faiths, and most are not predisposed to judging people of different faiths, such as Mormons or Wiccans. But that open-mindedness is sometimes due to their limited knowledge about the principles of their own faith and ignorance about other faiths as it is to a purposeful acceptance of other faiths.¹²⁴

These and similar inconsistencies within Christian understanding have been noted by other research groups as well. Recent results from analysis done in 2018 by Lifeway Research revealed additional trends of incoherent perspectives:

- 66% say that they believe everyone sins a little, but that people are good by nature, whereas only 23% say that believe that the smallest sin deserves judgment.
- 70% say that the believe in the triune God head, yet 57% also believe that Christ was created, and 59% believe that the Holy Spirit is a force, not a person.¹²⁵

Whether or not cognitive dissonance is playing a role or not would have to be studied further to come to any reasonable conclusions; little data seem to exist currently.¹²⁶ However, the research presented indicates at least a plausibility that cognitive dissonance is likely to be experienced during the early teenage years into young adulthood, therefore could be a serious contributor to

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ “Americans’ Theology is a Mix of Orthodox Belief and Shifting Opinions,” Lifeway Research, retrieved July 15, 2020, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2018/10/17/americans-theology-is-a-mix-of-orthodox-belief-and-shifting-opinions/>. Of note: this research sample was not targeting Christians in particular, rather Americans in general. This study was included merely to illustrate further the preponderance of incoherent views that are pervading within the culture.

¹²⁶ There was only one research study found on cognitive dissonance and spiritual commitment, to which the sample was extremely small, and taken from an LDS church population.

the large fall from the faith being observed today. This brings us to the discussion to the final part of the theory, which is the increasing distance of youth from the church.

Christian Distance

In a 2017 recent study, Lifeway Research noted that for youth between the ages of 18-22, two thirds dropped out of church entirely for at least a year.¹²⁷ Of those who dropped, almost the entire population (96%) cited a major change in their lives that was the cause. In order, the top five reasons are noted in the following chart:

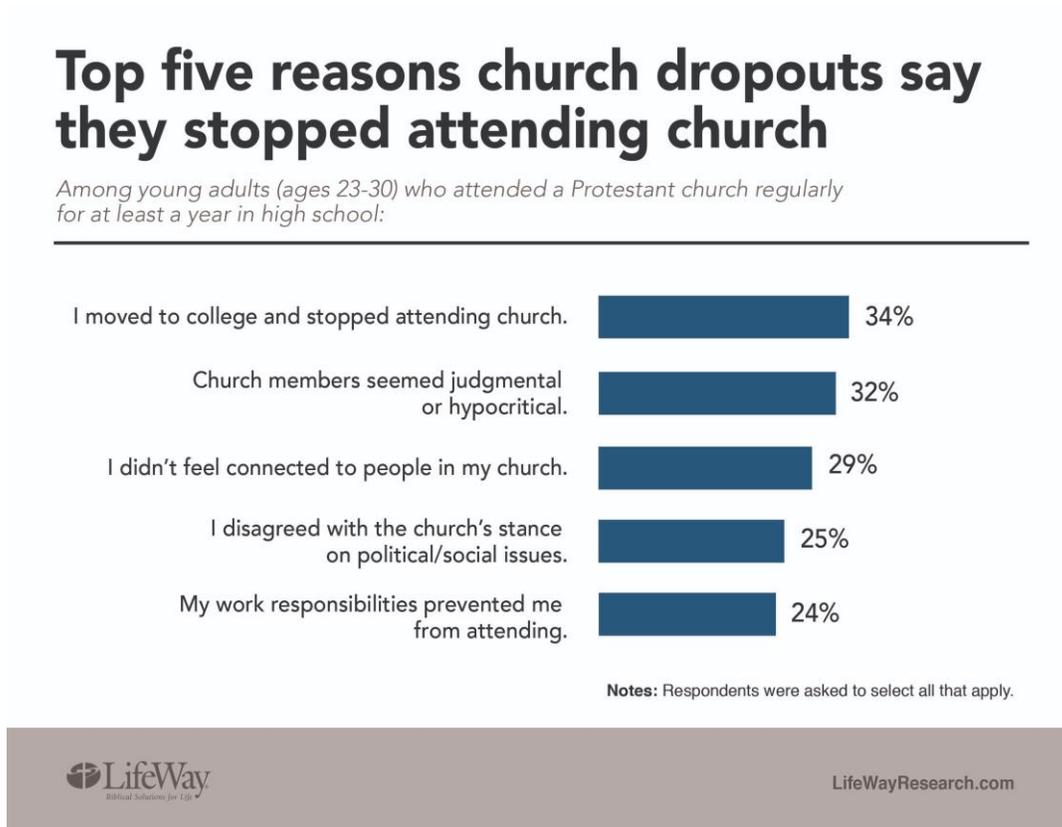


Figure 9 – Lifeway: Church Dropout Reasons¹²⁸

¹²⁷ “Most Teenagers Drop Out of Church as Young Adults,” Lifeway Research, retrieved July 15, 2020, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/01/15/most-teenagers-drop-out-of-church-as-young-adults/>

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Not only was college attendance the number one reason, Ben Trueblood at Lifeway noted that although some dropouts do eventually come back at some point, the vast majority do not. He says that “on some level, we can be encouraged that some return, while at the same time, we should recognize that when someone drops out in these years there is a 69 percent chance they will stay gone.”¹²⁹

Closely related to this study is the overall nature of doubt exhibited amongst Christians, where Barna notes in a 2017 study mentioned previously on the nature of spiritual doubt, that college graduates were twice as likely to experience doubt (37%) compared to those with only a high school education (19%).¹³⁰ It again begs the question as to what occurs within those four, seemingly formidable years while attending university. Though not directed at youth specifically, another study is clearly indicative of a distancing away from biblical truth. This is a particularly puzzling result, given that these specific statistics are representative of an evangelical population in the study sample:

- 84% of evangelicals in this sample say that hell is a real place of eternal judgment for those who do not trust in Christ; yet 48% of those same evangelicals believe that God accepts the worship of all religions.¹³¹

Lastly, Pew Research has published several studies on the status of American religion, trends, etc. In agreement with the earlier research noted in this chapter, as Christianity seemingly is on the steady decline, so too is a representative increase in the number of respondents identifying as

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ “Two Thirds of Christians Face Doubt,” Barna Group, accessed June 1, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/two-thirds-christians-face-doubt/>.

¹³¹ “Americans Love God and the Bible, Are Fuzzy on the Details,” Lifeway Research, Retrieved July 15, 2020, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2016/09/27/americans-love-god-and-the-bible-are-fuzzy-on-the-details/>.

religious “none” along with the overall doubling of atheism/agnosticism that was mentioned earlier:

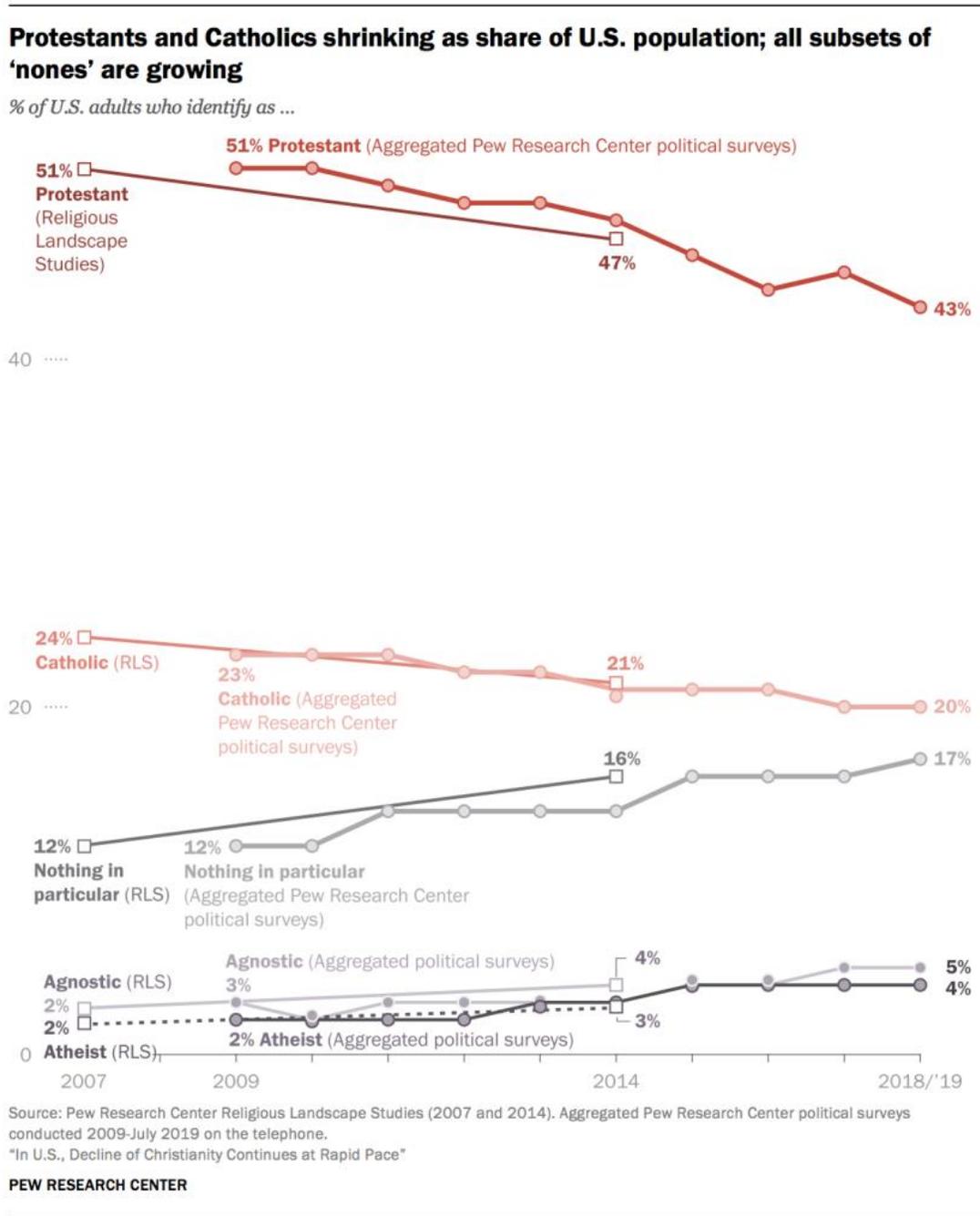


Figure 10 - Pew Research: Religious Trends (10 year)¹³²

¹³² "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace," Pew Research Center, retrieved July 15, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

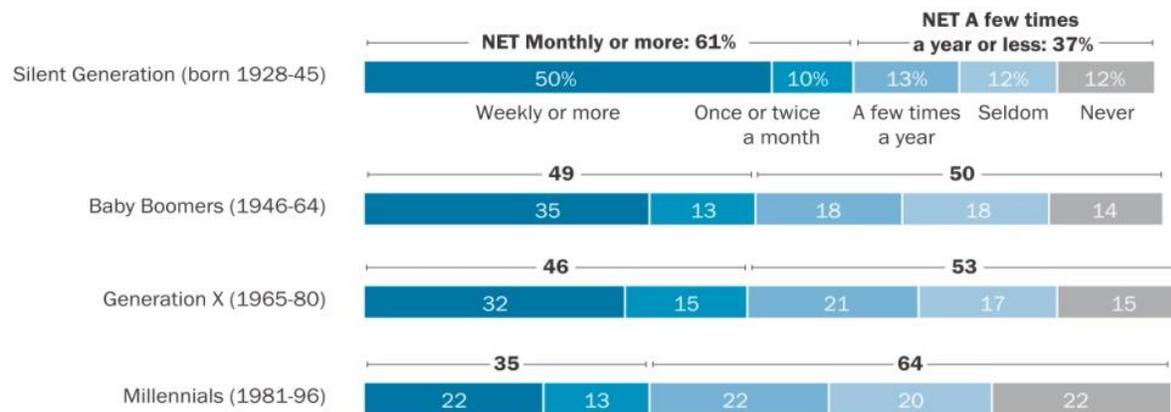
In raw numbers, the study noted the number of religious “nones” have increased by approximately 30 million in the aggregate, while those identifying as Christians decreased by slightly over 20 million over that decade time frame. The percentages across the generations, as well as church attendance, are particularly telling within the Christian youth population:

Large generation gap in American religion

In 2018/2019, % of U.S. adults who identify as ...



In 2018/2019, % of U.S. adults who say they attend religious services ...



Note: Don't know/refused not shown.

Source: Aggregated Pew Research Center political surveys conducted January 2018-July 2019 on the telephone. "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 11 - Pew Research: Generational Comparison (Identity and Church Attendance)¹³³

It is clear that Americans increasingly are distancing themselves from the church, both in identity and attendance. While admittedly some of these data do not specifically narrow the scope of the

¹³³ Ibid.

demographics down to youthful generations, when all the trends are viewed holistically, the overall conclusions easily point back to the several problems facing Christian youth today.

Conclusion

In summary, this chapter reviewed and refined the discussion on worldview as a concept, presented the overall trends noted from the research matrix, and posited the theory that youth within the church today embrace distinctly inconsistent views of the world, characterized by a “Christian incoherence,” causing varying degrees of individual cognitive dissonance, resulting in Christian distance. Across the three primary parts of this theory (Incoherence, Dissonance, and Distance), the research available shows clear trends with two of the three: Incoherence and Distance. Although cognitive dissonance certainly could be a plausible explanation as an intermediate cause of the secularization process in Christian youth, it is not possible at this point to judge one way or the other. There is a distinct gap in the data in this regard, therefore additional research on these specific phenomena is required in order to establish a causal relationship, and an overall determination on this theory.

CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSION

Jay: Did we talk on the phone last night?

Kay: You hung up on me!

Jay: Yeah . . . I did. But that was because of all of those secrets the universe doesn't know about."

(Jay pulls out his dead father's watch, sets it front of Kay)

Jay: But I've realized that last night was a long . . . long time ago. And really, I just want to say thank you."

Kay: It's been my privilege.

~ Final Diner Scene - "Men in Black III"

Overview and Future Research

In summary, this study reviewed, analyzed, and presented findings regarding the current research being conducted on the secularization of Christian youth. Through a grounded theory inquiry, data was analyzed across several data sources to posit a general theory that cognitive dissonance (brought about through Christian incoherence), is a potential contributing factor to the eventual secularization (and resultant distance) of Christian youth.

As was mentioned early on in the beginning discussions, it is a challenging topic. Not only is the nature of worldview itself a multifaceted concept in itself (harboring a wide spectrum of philosophical positions and opinions), just the demographic in question is complex. Even those who no longer categorize themselves as members of the "youth" category nonetheless can recall and appreciate the complexities of life as such. It is riddled with uncertainty and uncomfortable, drastic change. The statistics and thoughts presented here certainly are not meant

to discount this reality. The true focus and intent is to convey a message of importance and decisiveness; the older generation of disciples need to recognize the importance of not contributing to the confusion of Christian youth, and embrace the decisiveness required in order to bring that importance from a place of simple recognition, to a place of decisive remediation.

All have a part to contribute to help guard against the confusion. As this study is being written, humanity is not only facing a pandemic of remarkable impact to the entire globe, dozens of cities across the U.S. (as well as foreign nations) are experiencing a level of civil unrest, violence, looting, and lawlessness that has not been seen in decades. People are scared, youth are confused, and in the midst of it all, many are asking “Where is God in all of this?”

In the midst of all the confusion, there is something that should be remembered very closely, and perhaps written in the back of one’s Bible; the enemy of our souls loves confusion. Cognitive dissonance; the enemy is all about it. Spiritual uncertainty; the enemy likes that as well. Christian youth leaving the church and never coming back due to confusion; as mentioned earlier, it is like shooting fish in a barrel.

With regard to future efforts on this topic, this researcher makes the following suggestions. First, though the grounded theory methodology used in this study experienced mixed results, utilizing it in a qualitative research effort with Christian youth for the purposes of original research (i.e. interviews, case studies, etc.) would likely prove to be beneficial again if only to refine the nature of gaps in our understanding of the true nature of the problem. Another recommended research effort would be to conduct additional quantitative data collection with regard to cognitive dissonance as it relates to youth apostasy. Such research would have to take a deductive approach and posit hypotheses (as well as null hypotheses) to establish the appropriate collection methods required to prove/disprove any potential causal relationship.

Closing Remarks

The ending of the “Men in Black” franchise is quite unexpected, yet profound in its presentation. The relationship that develops between Agents Jay and Kay as they defend the galaxy is uncomfortable on the best of days, and riddled with hostile confrontations on the worst. Jay would ask to do something, Kay would say no. Jay would take the initiative; Kay would scold him. Jay would want to learn something; Kay would indicate that he was not ready. Over and over again, Jay runs into what he feels is a growing rift with Kay characterized by a simple lack of trust and confidence. He was frustrated to the point of no return one morning when Kay refuses to answer his overarching question “Kay, what happened to you to make you like this?” (Kay just walks away). Jay ends up having to go back in time in order to save Kay from dying in order for him to later save Earth from yet another threat. During the mission, Jay finally gets his answer, and the audience learns why Kay is the way he is.

Jay knew that he was an orphan, that his dad was a hero, but did not know why. As it turns out, Jay’s mission was not actually to save Kay at all. Though he did not realize it until it was all over, Jay ended up ensuring the person who *would* save Kay was exactly where he needed to be (at that exact moment) for the Earth to be saved—Jay’s lost father. From a distance, Jay witnesses a man die saving Kay, then sees a little boy getting out of a distant truck asking, “Where’s my dad?” Kay approaches the boy before he can see his dead father and asks him his name. “James” he says. James shows Kay the watch his father gave him and asks when his father will come back. Kay replies “He went to go do something very special, and he wanted me stay here and take care of his best pal.” Almost in tears, Kay erases some of James’ memory with his neurolyzer device and replaces his memory with one simple truth for James to remember . . . “Your daddy is a hero.” Kay takes the hand of James and walks him down the

shores of the beach . . . Agent Jay looks on with his own tears, now realizing that Kay has been watching over him as a surrogate father all this time—way before he recruited him into Men in Black. He travels forward in time back to the present day, which brings him to that last scene in the diner quoted earlier.

One's relationship with the actual (non-alien) Creator and protector of the universe is no different from Jay. Days are hard, life is confusing, and we often fail to understand why God operates in the way He does. Any true disciple with even the shortest of relationships with Christ can relate to Jay; despite being in a position where they did not even *know* their father (or believed their father was dead), the truth is that the Father was watching over them all along whether they knew it or not. No matter what, God's protection, wisdom, and guidance was there—even before we were recruited as members of God's family, being given the new title as a child of God.

The task for Christian youth is to do their best to sort through the confusion and live for God. The task for those ahead of them in years and experience is to clear away as much confusion as possible for them as a means to glorify God. This researcher has been blessed beyond all measure to finally recognize the divine calling to such a task; to see it as a privilege for the Glory of God. My prayer is that others will too recognize its importance, realize the decisiveness demanded for such a task, and actualize the work needed to make a difference for the Christian youth of today and tomorrow.

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APPENDIX A - Research Matrix Bibliography

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APPENDIX B (Cont.) - Research Matrix

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
	SOURCE	TYPE	Quant/ Qual.	Religious/ Secular	Youth/All	Origins	Purpose	Value	Morality	Nature	Destination
1	Summons - "Generational and Time Period Differences in American Adolescents' Religious Heterodox Academy - "Understanding the Campus Expression Climate"	Journal/Survey	Quant	Secular	Youth	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
74	Summons - "Generational and Time Period Differences in American Adolescents' Religious Heterodox Academy - "Understanding the Campus Expression Climate"	Journal/Survey	Quant	Secular	All	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
15	Sage - "Perceptions of Science and American Secularism"	Journal/Survey	Quant	Secular	All	Non-Transcendent	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Non-Transcendent
76	Summons - "Secular Humanism and Atheism beyond Progressive Secularism"	Journal/Survey	Qual	Secular	All	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
77	Summons - "The impact of secularism on the activity of the Church"	Journal/Survey	Qual	Secular	All	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
78	Summons - "The Relative Influence of Youth and Adult Experiences on Personal Spirituality and Church"	Journal/Survey	Quant	Secular	All	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
79	Summons - "The Relative Influence of Youth and Adult Experiences on Personal Spirituality and Church"	Journal/Survey	Quant	Secular	All	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

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